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THIS REPORT WAS WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY
THE NATIONAL COLLECTIVE. PEOPLE IN THE
COLLECTIVE AT THIS TIME ARE:

BRIAN ADAMS
RICH BANGERT
ED DAMATO

SAM SCHORR
MARLA WATSON
PETE ZASTROW

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A POSITION PAPER:

THE POLITICAL STATEMENT
OF THE NATIONAL COLLECTIVE
ON THE FUTURE OF VVAW/WSO

AUGUST, 1974

UNITED FRONT

As we begin to define the nature of VVAW/WSO and our work for the future, it is important that we take into consideration the anti-imperialist movement as a whole and not regard ourselves in isolation from this movement. When, in 1972, we first began to consciously develop our anti-imperialist stance as an organization, it was clear that many of the national, anti-war organizations of the 1960's were folding up and we were left as one of the few organizations that took a conscious step forward to carry on the struggle. Now, however, the objective conditions of the struggle in this country have changed. We can now see that the struggle against imperialism has taken a sharp turn upward and is intensifying on many fronts. Student groups, community groups, black groups, Chicano groups, workers groups, womens groups, welfare-rights groups, groups composed of the unemployed, etc. have developed all around us and we can see these organizations being formed in consciously anti-imperialist directions. VVAW/WSO is not the only organization or group of people to see the life and death struggle that must be waged against imperialism. Therefore, it would be incorrect for us to look at our work in narrow terms; that is, isolated from the understanding that other anti-imperialist forces are arising and gaining strength.

Should we oppose the formation of these new groups? Obviously not. In fact, we should be supporting each other in a conscious way so that the fight against imperialism is broader and more united. These organizations did not arise because of an ideal -- they arose because the masses of people are bearing the brunt of the crisis that U. S. imperialism is undergoing. These groups arose from the needs of particular sections of the people to fight back against their oppression, not just to "bear witness" to anti-imperialism. We think that the formation of new, anti-imperialist organizations is a good thing, and something to be encouraged.

Because these organizations exist and new ones are and will be forming, we believe that objectively, outside of any plan or formal declaration, a united front against imperialism is developing. To understand what a united front is, we should look to history and the front which developed against fascism in the 1930's. Georgi Dimitrov, one of the greatest fighters of fascism, defined a united front by calling it: "A broad mobilization and unification of the masses from below, at the enterprises, around the united organ for struggle created by the masses themselves." Dimitrov stressed that a united front is a "unity of action" directed against the common enemy -- in our case, imperialism. In other words, there is unity between those people honestly fighting their oppressor. The focus of the work may vary (i. e. with student groups vs. organizations of working people) but the purpose of work will remain the same -- to struggle against imperialism.

In the above quotation/definition, the term "at the enterprises" is very important for us today. This refers to the idea that people should be organized around that particular contradiction in society which oppresses them. Anti-imperialists need not go searching for "contradictions" to organize people around; there are plenty of them already in existence. What we must do as an organization is find and advance those slogans and forms of struggle which arise from the vital needs of veterans and GIs in the United States. We must meet the concrete needs of these people and express the urgency of fighting imperialism. If we fail to do this, then we are

chapters can exchange their experiences and knowledge so that correct summaries of our work can be drawn up. We should share ideas on how to draw in new members (i. e. the importance or lack thereof of personal contact, avoiding "cliquishness, etc), and where these new potential members can be found (i/e/ the VA, unemployment lines, campuses, welfare offices, the work-place, bars--near military bases to find GIs--transportation centers where GIs will be travelling through, etc.). We need to more thoroughly and effectively share our organizing experiences with one another so that we can learn from one another's practice. One of the ways to do this is for chapters to send an analysis of their actions to the National Office. These should not focus on the chronology of the action, but on the manner in which it was done, how people were approached, how people were recruited, etc. If these reports can be kept concise and fairly short, they can be gotten out to all regions via the national newsletter. Another way in which we could more effectively analyze and rectify our work would be to hold special workshops on these specific problems of style of work. These would be similar to the National Defense Committee workshops which have been held between NSCMs, and which have proved to be highly successful for getting down to the brass tacks of a problem.

The necessity of developing good methods of work cannot be stressed enough. Doing a regular summing-up and analysis of work will help us to better implement the program that we select to build VVAW/WSO in a systematic way. A program is a vital thing for the continued existence of an organization, and to make that program more effective, we must learn from our successes and our errors. We should actively entrench ourselves in more programmatic work on all levels of the organization; and along with this, we should also more thoroughly criticize our styles of work so that the growing anti-imperialist movement can be made stronger, and better able to attack imperialism at its weakest points.

NATIONAL PROGRAM

With the successful completion of the national demonstration in Washington, the 7-month program that was accepted at Yellow Springs NSCM is at an end. We believe that this program was very successful. Without it, the demo would not have come off as well as it did because it would not have related to any day-to-day work that this organization was doing. We also believe that the success of the program clearly points out the necessity for continued long-range planning. With regard to the first program, the demo was to be only a part of the overall strategy and not the end unto itself. Therefore, a continued program is vital.

There is a solid foundation on which to build a program of work for the future--the five demands of the Washington action. We believe that these demands provide the necessary link between immediate needs and more general, anti-imperialist issues that are vital to the growth of the anti-imperialist movement. Also, the majority of our membership have a good grasp of these demands and have already done much groundwork in bringing them to their communities. We must not lose this initiative gained by the Washington demonstration.

Because we feel that it is important to have a national program on which to build VVAW/WSO in a systematic way, we would suggest the use of the following scenario of dates and their political significance. These dates would provide the focus for nationwide actions around our five demands, though they would of course only be the "high points" in the campaigns which we build on a day-to-day basis.

September---Anti-Nixon demos
October 28---Vets Day/VA
November 11--Vets Day/VA

January 27---Indochina
March 29---Vietnam Vets Day
May 16---Armed Forces Day

The anti-Nixon demos, of course, will depend upon concrete conditions at that time. In fact, Nixon may have already been canned by the time you read this. If that is the case, we suggest victory celebrations that will also point to the fact that Nixon is just a representative of a class of people--namely, imperialists. The reason for the two dates for Veterans Day is that the Federal Date is different from the day set aside in many states. Some states even have "celebrations" on both days. Actions can occur on both days (again depending on the concrete conditions) and they may range from marching in the "official" parades to actions at the VA. The January action should again focus on Indochina and the violations of the agreement by the U. S. and Thieu. Vietnam Veterans Day in March is self-explanatory and the variety of militant actions which took place this year should be repeated in the future. The May date was selected because we feel it necessary that Armed Forces Day be resurrected and the militant actions that used to take place near military bases all over the country should be revived.

When organizing for these demonstrations, it is important that we involve other groups and individuals, and work to help them understand the importance of our actions. This can either be done through coalition work, or in a manner similar to the DC demo where we got groups to support our demands and planned activities. The support we obtained from other organizations and people was one of the keys to the success of the Washington demonstration; thus, we should also actively attempt to retain the support of non-VVAW/WSO people as we approach these future actions. It may also be helpful for regions to try and coordinate their actions with each other so that demonstrations are being approached in a similar way. This will give a

FOREWARD

(We had hoped to get this paper out to people sooner so that it could be discussed by chapters prior to the Buffalo National Steering Committee Meeting. Because of other responsibilities and the length of this paper, we regret that this could not have been done. We hope that people will not only read this paper, but that it will be studied. We expect to have good principled discussion around this paper and the nature of VVAW/WSO in Buffalo. We look forward to seeing many of you there).

VVAW/WSO is now undergoing an internal struggle around some very basic questions, questions which deal with the very nature of the organization and what will be its future. The National Collective thinks this struggle is a good thing, because as long as there is struggle, there is growth. This particular struggle is very sharp and this is also good since sharpness clarifies where people stand.

We believe that the struggle can be characterized into three distinct lines. One position would define VVAW/WSO as a veterans and GI organization working only on vets and GIs issues, exclusive of non-veterans. Another position holds that VVAW/WSO should be a mass, anti-imperialist organization period (having no base or focus). The last position holds that VVAW/WSO should be a mass, anti-imperialist organization with a veterans and GI base and focus, not exclusive of non-veterans.

The National Collective supports the last position: VVAW/WSO must be a mass, anti-imperialist organization with a veterans and GI base and focus. The rest of this paper is devoted to developing that position -- a POLITICAL analysis of the conditions we are working under, where we have been, errors in our work, and what the collective's position will mean for VVAW/WSO's future work.

in sprinkling a little sand in the gears of the military; we would like to see the whole military machine turned back on its operators. If the US military were crippled by the working class which makes up the backbone of the military, it would be a giant stride forward in the overall struggle to end imperialism.

We feel, therefore, that the organization in its daily work and at the National GI Conference in October should push the following overall principles: 1) The GI movement should be anti-imperialist; 2) there should be a cohesive national program and organization; and 3) the focus should be on organizing, not service. To elaborate, we feel that GIs can't be organized into "anti-imperialism in the sky" anymore than vets can. But issues on a particular base or post can be put into an anti-imperialist context. Every local gripe with the military flows from the uses of the military under imperialism.

Secondly, we feel that a program which is relevant to servicepeople all over the world is essential. The demand for a single-type discharge for all vets offers the best possibility. From this demand, GIs can tie in virtually all other forms of oppression in the military since the ultimate form of discipline that the military holds over a GI for resisting is the bad discharge. Racism, living and working conditions, the UCMJ, sexual oppression and the lack of 1st Amendment rights can all be tied into the call for a single discharge, but by focusing on the discharge system we will be able to sharpen the fight against racism, since the disciplinary system is clearly racist; and we will be able to begin explaining the imperialist nature of the discharge system and the entire role of the military. It also means that anywhere a GI is transferred he or she will be able to tie into the campaign for a single-type discharge. Local work, of course, must go on; however, we feel that the single discharge campaign can provide the unifying thread for all work among GIs.

Finally, we feel that work around GIs must focus on helping GIs to organize themselves. Ideally, there would be support groups in and around every base; but this is not possible, nor can we afford to wait until it is. We should concentrate on agitating--showing GIs that they can fight back--and turning out to support them when they need support. We should not be devoting our primary effort to providing services; there are other groups equipped to handle counseling. This doesn't mean that we won't help GIs find competent military lawyers if they run into trouble. What it does mean is that this will only be a small part of our work. The primary work should be on getting GIs to fight back--to show them that they have the same real strength that thousands of people displayed in Washington, DC in July.

essentially talking about a concept of "anti-imperialism in the sky." Fighting imperialism will not mean much to the every day lives of people because it will not deal with the urgent questions and problems which face them on a day-to-day basis. Thus, these "united organs for struggle" grow out of the needs of people's every day struggles. For example; unemployed workers will begin to organize around the contradiction of being unemployed; welfare mothers will organize around the rotten conditions they face; workers will organize around oppression and exploitation in the work-place; women will organize around the exploitation handed down in a male-oriented society; GIs will organize around the repression and racism of the military and the contradictions within the imperialist war machine; and veterans will organize around the contradictions between themselves having fought an imperialist war and returning home to an imperialist society.

To further define a united front, it is important to realize that it is not a coalition of organizations. Rather, a united front is the uniting together of as many people as possible to fight against the common enemy. One individual may be part of the united front, as well as the various organizations which struggle for the same purpose -- to defeat imperialism. To refer again to Dimitrov, the united front is a "broad mobilization" of the masses around those contradictions they SPECIFICALLY have with the imperialist system. Without mobilizing people around these specific contradictions, a sense of urgency will be lost; but if an understanding of urgency can be brought forward and organized around, a fighting spirit and a militancy will develop which will make the struggle that much more effective. On top of this, if we fail to organize around the specific needs of the people, we will be letting them down, we will be dishonest with them, and more concerned with "paying witness" to anti-imperialism than struggling for the real needs of oppressed people.

A classic example of a working united front would be the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. It is important to see that the NLF did not develop in thin air, but grew out of the struggle that the Vietnamese had been waging since World War II. The basis of the united front developed out of the desire of the Indochinese people to be rid of foreign domination, that is, rid of imperialism. Their United Front was developed to unite every person who was (and is) opposed to foreign intervention in their affairs. That is their sole basis of unity within the context of the programme of the NLF. The NLF is not one, monolithic organization. It is composed of many independent organizations -- veterans associations, womens leagues, teachers associations, labor unions, youth groups, Buddhists, political parties, etc. These groups have all united around the programme of the Front. Besides these separate groups, thousands of individuals take leadership from the Front without ever belonging to an organization. The major difference in their front is the centralized leadership that makes up the general staff of the NLF. However, before the NLF was founded in 1960, the united front was based on the Vietnamese's common desire to be free, while not formally organized into the NLF. It was only after years of struggle that the Vietnamese saw the need for centralized leadership in the form of the NLF, and only then this leadership was recognized based on the practice of the Viet Minh.

In short, a united front is like a fist. If the various fingers (or organizations) are clenched together in unity, the fist will be better able to strike an effective blow

against imperialism. If any of the fingers are missing or loose, then the blow will be weakened. Along with this, just as with a hand, the fingers are not one but are separate. They work together and they can unite to form a fist capable of dealing blows, but they can also work independently when that is necessary for the hand to be most effective. The same is true of the united front. Though a united front has a common purpose of opposing imperialism, all organizations within this front will not be involved in specifically the same work (i. e. women's groups will work with a specific focus on women's issues, students will work with a specific focus on issues affecting students, veterans will work with a specific focus on the problems of vets, etc). But they will all be working with a "unity of action," and even the specific areas and focus of work will be pointed in the one ultimate direction of defeating the enemy. Specific work will be conducted with independence (i. e. the focus and method of work of an organization will be the decision of that particular organization) but at the same time, the ability to unite to form the fist will always remain.

For a concrete example of how this "fist concept" operates, we should look at the recent demonstration we had in Washington. There, we put forward slogans that were anti-imperialist in nature, and which applied to the entire struggle against U. S. imperialism. We also put forward demands that spoke to the specific needs of veterans and GIs. In addition, we sought and received the support of many other anti-imperialist and anti-war organizations. These other groups joined with us and supported all of our demands because they felt that the raising of such demands was an attack against imperialism. We consider this a simplistic example of how the united front works and how important it was to the success of our action. It would be incorrect for us to try to organize the students that were there around THEIR needs, but it was correct for us to actively seek their involvement and unite together, with a "unity of action," to struggle against imperialism here and abroad.

Again, we should be aware that the united front is not an organization unto itself. It is not an easily define or specific grouping of people, but rather is a "broad mobilization" of the masses around their specific contradictions with the imperialist system. A united front is beginning to develop within the U. S., and it is important that we fit into this development. Alone, we cannot, nor should we, be the organization which wages struggles against imperialism on all fronts. Our responsibility is to fit into the broader front, uniting with other organizations and individuals, and attack imperialism where we can be most effective, where we can best raise and serve the interests of the people, and where we can express the urgency and fighting spirit of a specific sector of our society with maximum effectiveness.

WHY ORGANIZE VETERANS IN THE UNITED FRONT?

As we see it, there are two reasons for organizing veterans: 1) They are an identifiable constituency; and 2) they have a special oppression which can be tied to imperialism. Fifteen percent of the population has been in the military and over 6 million of those have been discharged in the last ten years, which clearly makes them identifiable. Everyone is aware that there are veterans of military service.

The oppression faced by these millions of veterans is directly related to their experience within the U. S. military and the fact that they have returned to an imperialist country. The whole military experience has led to utter outrage at the whole system. For many vets, the time they spent in the military meant they lost several years of seniority at their job -- for many it meant they lost their job completely. If you went into the military straight out of high school, there wasn't even a job to build up seniority in; and on top of that, you lost several years time that could have been devoted to job training or college.

And then there were all those great promises about the benefits. All the promises about good medical care, a free education and a decent job turned out to be lies. They were promises that the system is totally unable to fulfill. Understaffed VA hospitals, inadequate education allowances and the public relations "Hire the Vet" programs are all real form of oppression for a veteran. What makes this situation even worse is a bad discharge or a bad SPN number. This organization is well aware of how bad discharges and SPN numbers effect vets. These are real problems that must be spoken to. They are real problems that result in our life under imperialism. And they are real problems that will take a fighting organization to effectively deal with, because the government has no intention of dealing with them, nor do the veteran pimps and careerists or the reactionary veterans organizations. All of this leads to the question of leadership.

The fact that veterans have real needs has led to a rising and largely spontaneous veterans movement. For example, the veterans that went to Washington, DC on March 29th were not part of ANY national, political organization. The fact that there is a spontaneous movement is an indication not only that there are veterans who can be organized, but that they must be organized. The question is, who is going to organize them? Who is going to play the leading role? It is certainly clear that someone is going to organize vets. History is clear on that. Everyone from the American Legion to AVM to college vets clubs are trying to organize vets. The problem is that they are all continuing the same reactionary trends started by groups like the American Legion when it was founded after World War I, which is leading veterans down a blind alley picking up a crumb or two here and there. The current situation of veterans and the lack of any national political organizations that are fighting for veterans (besides us) should bear this out. All of these organizations, whether consciously or unconsciously, are in fact serving the same interests -- the people who run this country who don't want vets talking about imperialism. If we, as an anti-imperialist organization, fail to provide leadership for this developing movement, we will not only be betraying what we stand for, but we will be leaving this spontaneous movement to the reactionaries and careerists.

Furthermore, VVAW/WSO has historically been, and still is, in the best position to lead and develop this veterans movement in an anti-imperialist direction. The organization was born on a base of veterans, and to this day, veterans are playing a primary role in the organization. Just as important as the history is the current practice of the organization. The growing nationwide focus in VVAW/WSO on veterans' issues like bad discharges, SPN numbers and poor treatment by the VA is a clear indication that we are ready, willing, and capable of organizing vets.

By providing leadership for the veterans movement, we mean just that. We are not speaking about organizing every vet into VVAW/WSO, although that would be great. We are talking about building VVAW/WSO into a fighting organization with an anti-imperialist outlook which veterans and veterans groups will look to for leadership. We are talking about fighting for our demands, not from a narrow, reformist perspective, but within the larger context of the struggle against U.S. imperialism.

Veterans are in a very unique position in America. From their experience in the U.S. military, they have seen both sides of U.S. imperialism. They have seen the one side that is the U.S. military involved in all parts of the world, and they have come home to see the other side of U.S. imperialism exploiting the working people here. It is a position from which veterans can attack not only the foreign involvement of U.S. imperialism, but also the effects that it has on working people -- both veterans and non-veterans -- here at home.

The current poor treatment of veterans is only one of the cracks in U.S. imperialism. But the cracks are no accident; they are the inevitable result of the widening crisis of U.S. imperialism. By building an anti-imperialist veterans movement, we have an opportunity to unite yet another segment of society in the growing front against U.S. imperialism.

WHY ORGANIZE G. I. S IN THE UNITED FRONT?

What is primary in understanding the necessity of developing an anti-imperialist GI movement is both the role that the military plays under imperialism and the special oppression that GIs face. The military is a primary tool of imperialism, both at home and abroad. Here in the U. S., the military is fully prepared to act as a strike-breaking force or to back up local police forces in the event of a "civil disorder." It remains equally ready to support foreign, U. S. -backed dictatorships.

Imperialism dictates the role that the military will play, and as long as the system of U. S. imperialism remains intact, the military will continue to be used against people all over the world; and it will continue to oppress the GIs who make up the U. S. military. The role of the military, then, and the oppression that it breeds calls for a fighting movement of GIs who can combat their own oppression and the roles they are forced to play.

The oppression that GIs face is very real. The problem, however, with organizing solely from within the military is that it is comparable to trying to organize within a prison, since GIs are forever at the whim of their commanders. Unlike most other jobs in civilian society, they are prohibited from either striking or quitting; instead they face the constant harassment of both judicial and non-judicial punishment whenever they fight back. Such a situation calls for outside support.

The class background of GIs make them a natural ally for all the other groups struggling against imperialism; and with the advent of the all-volunteer army and the growing economic crisis, the percentage of working class people in the military, especially third world people, is steadily increasing.

VVAW/WSO should be building the GI movement within the united front, both by building the GI membership within our organization and through the leadership that we can exert through our practice. We should be doing this work among GIs, not only because of the oppression of the military and the class background of the GIs, but also because there is already an existing, spontaneous movement among GIs in the military. The actions of sailors aboard the USS MIDWAY and the USS LITTLE ROCK are but the most well-known, recent examples of GIs fighting back. But these actions, as with the MIDWAY, were either spontaneous and not part of any coordinated effort against conditions in the Navy, or they were, as with the LITTLE ROCK, reactions to situations that the GIs had no control over, i. e. a racial attack. For the GI movement to become a strong, fighting movement, it will be necessary to do more than "react" or spontaneously walk off a ship; it will be necessary to develop a unified approach with a common direction and firm leadership that puts GIs on the offensive. Spontaneity will lead nowhere.

Just as with the veterans movement, the fact that GIs are fighting back is a clear sign that GIs not only can be organized, but must be organized. The current state of the GI movement shows even more reasons to begin a serious organizing effort. With the exception of a few projects, the energy-level is very sporadic and

the identity with the anti-imperialist movement as a whole is limited. The reasons for this are that there has been a serious lack of both political and programmatic unity among the GI movement; and among other people and groups on the left, a real lack of understanding for the need for a fighting movement for GIs. For those who do understand the importance, it has been difficult to find a way to plug into the GI movement. Those people who have remained in the GI movement have done so either because of a deep theoretical commitment and a long attachment to the struggles of GIs, or they are veterans. But as with any movement, the people that provide the momentum must be those who are most directly affected by a particular issue. Not that people with a theoretical understanding of the importance of GI organizing should be discouraged; quite the contrary. They should be welcomed with open arms! But in developing a movement, regardless of the issue, we have to look to the people most directly effected by the issues.

As an organization with a high percentage of veterans and GIs, we are very much effected by the issues. We also have the greatest experience of any national, anti-imperialist organization in organizing GIs. Not only do we have veterans in the organization, but we are the only national anti-imperialist organization with members in the U.S. military all over the world. For the GIs in the organization, the oppression of the military is a fact of life; for veterans, it is an unforgettable experience. And for us to ignore this historical relationship within the organization to military service would be to ignore not only our duty as an anti-imperialist organization, but it would be ignoring our historical roots.

As we said earlier, there is a need for leadership. And just as with the veterans movement, we are not talking about getting every GI to join VVAW/WSO, although that would be ideal. What we are talking about is becoming a consistent force in the GI movement that GIs and GI organizers will respect; we are talking about raising GI demands in a non-opportunist, anti-imperialist manner that is obvious in our practice.

BRIEF HISTORY OF VVAW/WSO

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 marked the beginning of the major escalation of the war in Vietnam. Under the phoney pretext of defending an American naval ship, the imperialists poured military hardware, advisors, money, and American troops into Vietnam. At the same time in the U. S. thousands of Americans were actively working in the civil rights movement, exposing the racist conditions in the American system. Soon there was a clear connection between this racism in the U. S. and the imperialist war of genocide in Indochina. Millions of Americans became active in struggling against the war in Vietnam.

By 1967, the movement for civil rights and against the war in Vietnam was involving all sectors of the American people. Just as the Vietnamese were fighting imperialism, so too were millions of Americans. Fighting against the system was also the task of GIs stationed in Indochina and the task of veterans who returned from Vietnam having seen first hand how the system of imperialism operates abroad. It was only natural that these veterans would organize into a group that actively made the connections between the war aimed at maintaining the interests of US corporations with the imperialist system at home. On June 1, 1967 six Vietnam veterans formally began the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The organization soon expanded throughout the Northeast, uniting behind the common experience of having served in Vietnam.

During its first years, VVAW members spoke at many meetings and rallies and participated in the large anti-war demonstrations under the organizational banner. As it grew, VVAW began organizing its own demonstrations, recognizing that Vietnam veterans had the potential to fight against the war in Indochina by showing the American people just how the war was being conducted. In September of 1970, over 100 veterans marched from Morristown, New Jersey, to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania conducting a mock search and destroy mission, Operation Rapid American Withdrawal.

To make this point clearer, VVAW held the Winter Soldier Investigation early in 1971 in Detroit, Michigan. This investigation presented over 150 Vietnam veterans who testified about their roles in Vietnam, systematically exposing the role of the military. It clearly emerged that the military was conducting a genocidal war against the Indochinese peoples, not defending democracy as we had been told.

As a result of this investigation the anti-war movement looked at veterans in a different light. At first, all veterans and GIs were looked at as "war criminals" for participating in the war. But with the important step taken by VVAW in exposing the role the military played, this view was changed.

Shortly after the WSI, in the latter part of February, the first national steering committee of VVAW held a meeting. At this meeting, the present structure of the organization was formed, recognizing that we had become a national organization. Also formulated at this meeting was the idea of holding a national action in Washington DC. This action was called Dewey Canyon III.

Dewey Canyon III, named after the illegal military operations into Laos, drew national attention as a result of the actions that occurred in Washington--the throwing away of medals, defying the Supreme Court by staying on the Mall and marching to Arlington National Cemetery. The major aims of the demonstration were to influence both the American people and the US Congress; the former was successful, and the latter proved to be a dismal failure. As a result of this action and subsequent actions during this same period, the organization came to understand that its actions should be directed towards the American people and not the U. S. government.

While the organization maintained its identity as a Vietnam veterans organization, it soon became apparent that other veterans wanted to join and participate in the activities of the group. This was readily accepted and we became a veterans organization, recognizing that because of our base, we were the perfect vehicle for all veterans to protest the war.

While we were predominantly concerned with the war in Indochina, we recognized the links between racism in the US and racism with which the war in Vietnam was being conducted. The national organization took a big step forward in June of 1971 by voting at a National Steering Committee Meeting to support the struggle being waged in Cairo, Illinois by black people who were boycotting white-owned stores while withstanding armed attacks from white racists. In August of that same year we organized, at the request of the Cairo United Front, a convoy of food and supplies to aid the black people of Cairo. Thus, on a national level, the organization made its first step in recognizing the links between imperialism abroad and at home.

At about the same time we began to see an opening up of the membership to include non-veterans, both men and women, who saw the organization as an important one through which to struggle against the war in Indochina. The tactics of the organization also changed. In December of 1971, when the US bombed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam with B-52s, members of the organization took over the Statue of Liberty, the Lincoln Memorial, the Saigon Consulate in San Francisco and other places around the country. These actions clearly pointed out the increasingly militant mood of VVAW.

The organization was now officially only one year old. At the Denver NSCM in February of 1972, a group of self-proclaimed anarchists saw fit to dismember the national structure in favor of "regional autonomy," which in fact was a repudiation of a national cohesion. This error was the result of a lack of an organizational understanding of the nature of imperialism and of the necessity for working together in a strong organization with a cohesive national focus. But the overriding concern of the mass membership for a strong national organization paved the way for the realization that the Denver meeting was a grave error. What was needed was a growing program of work on a national level.

During the remainder of 1972 this occurred. At the Houston meeting in April of 1972, when the organization was saved from the Denver errors, the organization voted to participate as a national unit at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions in Miami Beach, Florida.

While plans for this demonstration were in progress, the government slapped

eight members of the organization with a series of false charges basically saying that we were planning to violently disrupt the conventions. These eight members stood trial, but in reality the entire organization was being attacked. The government had come to see our potential and felt that it was time to crack us. For over a year, the organization exposed this tactic and finally in August of 1973 these ridiculous charges were thrown out by the jury hearing the case.

The Republican and Democratic conventions drew members from around the country. The strong militant actions of VVAW once again proved that we were a major force in the anti-war movement. This was also the first time that all members of the organization marched together, rather than having the "supporters" march in the rear behind the veterans.

At the next NSCM, in Palo Alto, California, one of the major discussions was about the future of the organization. It was at this time that the Winter Soldier Concept was introduced. This concept envisioned transforming VVAW into THE mass organization in the US; one that would unite all who were opposed to the war in Indochina and who were opposed to the imperialist system. It would, in other words, become the united front.

There were many concrete reasons given for moving the organization towards this concept. We were looked at by other movement groups as the prime force in the anti-war movement; we had the ability to draw in a real mass membership of veterans and non-veterans alike; we were one of the few national organizations that was still actively organizing; we were held in esteem by a wide number of international organizations and political parties; we had a number of non-veterans particularly women in leadership positions; and we were looking to the day when the war in Indochina would be over and were searching for a program to take up at that time. A concrete proposal outlining how this transformation would take place was presented at the Chicago NSCM held in early January of 1973.

This meeting occurred shortly after the saturation bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong in December of 1972. A result of this bombing was that the organization voted at the Chicago meeting to have another national demonstration in Washington on Inaugural Day, January 20. This was the largest turnout the organization had ever amassed to that time. Just sever days after this demonstration, the Peace Agreements on Ending the War in Vietnam were signed; the result of 11 years of the Vietnamese people fighting against the U. S. , and winning; and the result of as many years of struggle by the American people who opposed the war there.

In February and March it became clear the U. S. was not going to abide by the agreements. The organization began searching for ways to continue to struggle against the Indochina war while recognizing that imperialism was the enemy. The result was that the Winter Soldier concept took root. In April of 1973 at the Placitas, New Mexico meeting the organization voted to become VVAW/WSO.

While we had now created a structure which reflected the actual membership of the organization, we did not yet understand how to use that structure to build the organization or the struggle against imperialism. Our national action in Gainesville, in the summer of 1973 reflected an unfocused organization. In fact, the trial in Gainesville provided the only national activity which the organization had at that

This section of the paper deals with the questions of what becoming a mass anti-imperialist organization with a veterans and GI base and focus would mean.

1. Should we stop recruiting non-veterans or throw non-vets out of the organization? No. We are saying that we should focus our organizing work on vets and GIs; people who see the need for this work should be welcomed with open arms. Being a veteran is not a prerequisite. In the GI movement, for one example, many of the most effective organizers historically have been people who were neither GIs nor veterans.

We are not saying that the organization should regress to its pre-Winter Soldier days; we should have learned from the mistakes of that period AND from the mistakes we have made since the change to VVAW/WSO. And we should consolidate what we have learned. The majority of new members, under this concept, would probably be veterans and GIs since we are speaking to their concrete needs and interests. But we want--and should recruit--non-vets who want to join in the anti-imperialist struggle through work around vet and GI issues.

2. Would this change cause us to lose members? Yes, it probably would. It would cause us to lose some honest members whose primary interests are not with the struggles of vets and GIs; although these people would be "lost" to VVAW/WSO, they would not be lost to the anti-imperialist movement, because they would either find or develop those organizations which could best fight imperialism around their particular needs. Because they would be part of the united front against imperialism, they would not, in a larger sense, be "lost" to VVAW/WSO at all.

We would also lose those people for whom the struggle against imperialism is the vague "imperialism in the sky" without direct relation to the everyday real struggles of the masses of people. For these present members of VVAW/WSO, urgent, vigorous, militant struggle around immediate issues has no appeal and they would leave the organization.

3. Isn't this change just what the Revolutionary Union wants us to do? Yes, to a great extent. But the RU is not the only organization which sees us as an organization with a veterans and GI base and focus--so does Nixon, the Democratic Party (remember the attempts to get us to organize "vets for McGovern?"), the National Council of Churches, the CPUSA, NCUUA, the PRG, the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, and on and on. What is primary, however, is not who supports the veterans and GI focus of the organization; what is primary is whether that direction will move VVAW/WSO and the anti-imperialist struggle forward in the most effective possible way. In short, it's not who puts a line forward, but what the line is.

The position advocated in this paper is the position of the VVAW/WSO national collective; we advocate these changes because we believe they point the direction the organization should move, for the reasons given throughout this paper. We feel the important questions about this paper are political--is the analysis of our organizational history correct? Have we drawn the right lessons from our past practice? Have we accurately identified bad tendencies in the organization and would these

tendencies, if continued, lessen or destroy our effectiveness? We believe that it is around questions such as these that the future of the organization should be discussed.

4. What does this mean in terms of national projects of the organization? First, it means that we make a clear distinction between projects and those issues which we support (along the lines of what we called an endorsement at the Milwaukee NSCM). A national program or project which focuses on veteran or GI issues, in the context of anti-imperialism, should be organized by VVAW/WSO. As with the demonstration in Washington, we should ask other anti-imperialist organizations to support and build these projects and programs, but not ask other groups to take such projects on as their primary organizing responsibility. At the same time, we should support (endorse) those anti-imperialist struggles organized by other groups--for example, the struggle of the Farmworkers. We should also support, on a national basis, struggles which, though they are organized on a local basis, need national support--for instance, the Lawton/Gardner trial or the Leavenworth Brothers.

As exemplified by Operation County Fair, we should not undertake projects which diffuse the focus of the organization; OCF showed that we do not have the capability of organizing a project around poor healthcare in the rural south--nor should we take on that kind of project. If a community group in Bogue Chitto were organizing the project, strong chapters in that area of the country could and should support such a project which grew out of the needs of the people. The national organization could be asked to support the project through sending equipment or doing publicity. But it is not the task of VVAW/WSO to organize such a project.

With a clear organizational focus on veterans and GIs comes a limited scope for national projects and programs. Active support of other projects or programs should continue as part of the united front against imperialism.

5. Does this mean we work only on veteran and GI issues? No. It means that our organizing work would be done around these issues. To do this work in the context of anti-imperialism means that we would also work on and support other anti-imperialist struggles. Specifically, it means we would continue to actively support the truckers, or the Borden strikers, or the Harlin County coal miners, or the Attica Brothers; we would not organize these struggles. In terms of our prison project, we would continue to do veterans' work in prisons (DUP's, for instance) or GI work in the case of Leavenworth Disciplinary Barracks, and we would continue to help in the struggles of prisoners around the country to organize and unify inside their prisons.

It certainly does not mean that we would give up our active support of the peoples of Indochina nor does it mean that our support would in any way lessen. As one of the few organizations which continues to stress the fact the war is still going on, we would not stop in our struggle for final implementation of the agreements, and for the freedom and independence of the Indochinese. Again in the context of anti-imperialism, we would continue to support the struggles of people around the world for liberation from U. S. imperialism.

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time, and there was only a partial unity around that issue. This was reflected in the turnout in Gainesville; the fact that other organizations did not participate in that demonstration further reflected our lack of understanding of our obligation to help build the united front.

The steering committee meeting in St Louis in August 1973 looked for something --anything--which could serve as a national focus for the work of the organization, understanding (though not always on a formulated, conscious level) that a national organization needed a national program. We turned to the program we knew best, the Indochina War, and formulated plans for Indochina Solidarity Week; to keep the continuing war in the eyes and minds of the American people. Organizational discipline was not adequate to create actions by every chapter; mass support for actions around Indochina was not mobilized; the necessary preparation for this kind of national action had not been done. Some chapters carried out a week of activities; many chapters carried out some kind of action, but there was not a clear national action around that week; many chapters did nothing at all. Still, the Indochina Solidarity Week did provide a minimal focus for the organization.

What the period from Placitas until the NSCM in Yellow Springs showed was that we needed a national program which would focus on the concrete needs of people, and which would be something more than a week's worth of activity. As early as the Placitas meeting we had passed a position paper on amnesty; local chapters had done some educational work around the issue, and through that practice we had begun to see amnesty as a national issue. The result, at the NSCM at Yellow Springs, was the adoption of an amnesty program which gave an overall focus to the work of the organization for a 7-month period, building toward a national demonstration to be held sometime in late spring or early summer of 1974. This demonstration would be the beginning of another campaign at a higher level of struggle.

Through this national focus, most chapters began work around amnesty--some began DUP, some began with petitions or talks or leafletting. Whatever the tactic used, there was a national program. There was also an amnesty movement made up, for the most part, of groups or individuals from the anti-war movement. Within this grouping, we pushed for a strong political position on amnesty, a position which would concentrate on the issue of the continuing war and present a class analysis as part of the amnesty issue. Most important, however, was our push within that movement for recognition of people with less-than-honorable discharges as the leading sector of the resisters deserving amnesty. In short, we had found a group of veterans, some of whom were already members of our organization, whose immediate needs for relief from the oppression of a bad discharge could be met by our national program.

Because we had a national program did not mean that local chapters or regions stopped work on a number of other projects. In fact, the beginnings of organizational unity which came from a national focus began to show through national work around the Lawton/Gardner trial, a 2-year-old national project which had never before received any serious national attention from the organization outside of the publicity in the paper. Throughout the country we were able to support the primary work being carried on by the Riverside Political Prisoners Defense Committee through sponsoring speaking tours, getting the Lawton/Gardner story out to the people and, in the process, educating ourselves around the racism and repression of the American justice system.

We put that education to use by tying it into the other projects we worked on locally, regionally, and nationally.

One of the results of the national focus around a clear program was the success of the demonstration in Washington, DC on the 1st through the 4th of July 1974. The demonstration was prepared for carefully with the original plans made 7 months in advance. More important, however, it represented a target for day-to-day consistent national work. As the demonstration grew closer it was broadened from an amnesty demo to one which included five demands, all of them set in the context of anti-imperialist politics. Concrete demands spoke to the problems facing veterans, and the war in Indochina and amnesty were the focus of other demands--with the final demand, Kick Nixon Out, focusing on the most visible representative of the imperialist US system.

Understanding that we were not the only organization working against imperialism, we went to other organizations asking them not only to support the demonstration by coming to it, but actively build for the demo--not because they had the same prime interest that we did in the issues around veterans, but because we felt the direction of the demonstration was anti-imperialist and thus deserved their active support. The result was the militant, spirited success which took place in DC and which was, as mentioned in the section on the united front, an example of how that united front concept can work in actuality.

Through the period since we became VVAW/WSO one fact has shone through our practice: those chapters which continued to grow and strengthen (numerically and politically) have worked around a specific organizing focus, and, in most places, no matter what the composition of the chapter in terms of veterans or non-veterans, this focus has been around amnesty with particular emphasis on vets issues.

The practice of individual chapters underlines an important lesson: chapters with a clear focus of activities around the real needs of the people have grown. With growth these chapters have been able to add effective support work for other struggles in their communities. Chapters which have not grown or have shrunk fall into two categories. First, there are the chapters whose focus has been primarily internal; whether that focus has been around dissension among the members, or providing a base for social activities, or working primarily around the individual needs or wishes of the specific membership of the chapter, those chapters have not grown. Second, chapters which have diffused their activities, working on prisons one week, in-plant organizing the next, and Indochina the third, etc etc have not created a solid base of membership and have not grown. Chapters whose work takes place mostly in coalitions--which do not attack the problems of a specific segment of the population--have also remained stagnant in terms of membership.

What is true on a local level was also demonstrated on a national level through the actions in DC; when VVAW/WSO had a national program and a national focus designed to meet specific needs, and when we worked as part of a united front against imperialism, we could pull off a militant national action. Through that focus, through programmatic unity as well as the unity of being anti-imperialist, we could attract new members and grow.

INCORRECT TENDENCIES IN VVAW/WSO

The following section deals with some of the major problems seen in the future development of VVAW/WSO. These problems manifest themselves today in general concepts, attitudes and tendencies that will increasingly impede the development of the organization and hold back the anti-imperialist struggle if they are not combatted. Undoubtedly, VVAW/WSO has made many errors in the past and will make others in the future. The point is not that we make mistakes, (to think that we won't is utterly unrealistic!), but that we must analyze these mistakes and learn how to correct our practice in the future. We cannot allow errors to go unchecked until they have grown into major problems. In terms of the larger question of arriving at a clear understanding of the nature of VVAW/WSO and its future, it is important for all of us to achieve an understanding of these problems.

Fighting imperialism is certainly not just confined to the US. The struggle against US imperialism has been going on since the early 1900s. In terms of constantly analyzing our own practice, continually correcting our mistakes and improving our future practice, there is much we can learn from the history of these struggles. The lessons of such struggles against imperialism as Vietnam, Cambodia, China, Korea, Cuba, etc., can be of invaluable assistance to us in continually strengthening our own movement and avoiding needless mistakes. From our own practice and from the lessons of our brothers and sisters around the world, we must constantly be recharting our own course of action in the struggle against US imperialism if we are to defeat it.

One of the primary problems inherent in some members' conception of VVAW/WSO today is the notion that VVAW/WSO is the movement, in its entirety, or that it should develop into such. Particularly at a time when the people's movement is gaining strength by leaps and bounds, (as witnessed by the rising number of strikes, increasing strength of the struggles of Third World people against national oppression, the resurgence of the student movement, etc.), this attitude presents an increasing threat to the development of VVAW/WSO and also a hindrance to the development of the general anti-imperialist movement.

In the section on the united front it was pointed out that there is a developing united front against imperialism in the US. We cannot overemphasize the fact that VVAW/WSO is not the only organization in the anti-imperialist movement: it cannot be all things to all people. VVAW/WSO cannot try to be that united front in and of itself!

There are a number of very good reasons for this statement. First of all, a united front goes far beyond an organizational form. It is a much broader grouping than the sum of all those organizations in it. Many people who aren't in any organization whatsoever will take leadership from the general program of the front. Secondly, VVAW/WSO, like any effective organization, must have a basic organizational focus. It must have primary tasks that define the nature of the organization --- the goal people are being organized towards in the context of bringing masses of people into the anti-imperialist movement. Otherwise what will inevitably develop is an escalating confusion and lack of clarity among the people whom we are trying to organize about what the role and tasks of the organization really are. The less clear

the organization's role and tasks are, the greater will be the ineffectiveness of whatever tasks are undertaken. While VVAW/WSO must link up with all progressive forces in the developing anti-imperialist united front, if it tries to be that united front itself it will confuse its own tasks beyond recognition.

Finally, as was stated above, there are many other organizations already in existence. These other groups have special constituencies with special demands to fight for: welfare recipients, the unemployed, students, farmworkers, etc. In addition to these special demands, there is also an overall responsibility to push forward the anti-imperialist struggle. Such groups are far better prepared to represent these constituencies than VVAW/WSO is. Imagine how ridiculous it would be for vets who want to fight oppressive conditions in the VA to join the United Farm Workers to do so. Imagine how ridiculous it would be for farmworkers to join VVAW/WSO to fight oppression and exploitation in the lettuce fields or grape vineyards! These other organizations have no intention of structurally joining with VVAW/WSO nor should they. Aside from the fact that we, organizationally, lack the practical experience necessary to organize these various groups, the truth of the matter is that we simply couldn't handle such an enormous task anyway.

The question that logically follows is, where do these incorrect ideas come from? The answer is found in a number of sources. First of all is the confusion of the nature and the role of a mass organization as opposed to that of a cadre organization or political party. As was pointed out in the National Office Report to the 12th NSCM in the section on mass organizations, VVAW/WSO is not a cadre organization, it is a mass anti-imperialist organization. (It should also be pointed out that this National Office Report on VVAW/WSO and Mass Organizations neglected the question of the nature and focus of VVAW/WSO as a particular, mass anti-imperialist organization. That question is being addressed in this paper.) Certain members in VVAW/WSO, however, feel that VVAW/WSO is or should be a cadre organization, that it should assume the vanguard of leadership in the anti-imperialist movement. They feel VVAW/WSO should be the vanguard organizational form to lead workers, students, the unemployed, etc., as well as vets and GIs. In short that VVAW/WSO should assume the responsibilities of a political party! This incorrect analysis of the nature of VVAW/WSO can be called 'vanguardism'.

It is a progressive thing for people to desire an even greater level of discipline and commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle; that is certainly needed. In the context of VVAW/WSO, however, 'vanguardism' takes our basis of unity, anti-imperialism, and incorrectly replaces it with a complete world view. The truth of the matter is that there is no such level of political unity within VVAW/WSO. It is in the very nature of a mass organization that there be widely divergent political outlooks. It does not have the political unity to achieve a complete world view, nor should it. Secondly, it is in the very nature of a cadre organization, of a political party, to demand a very strict discipline. Membership is not open in a cadre organization. It is only open for those that have proven they can adhere to that strict discipline. Again, that is certainly not the case with VVAW/WSO. We would be fooling ourselves to believe we had such a degree of discipline.

Finally, there is the question of a programme. A cadre organization must have a programme to lead the entire people in their struggle if it is to be such a vanguard form. VVAW/WSO does not have such a programme. VVAW/WSO, as an organization, isn't equipped politically, structurally or any other way to be a van-

guard, cadre organization and would botch the job incredibly if we tried. VVAW/WSO is, however, admirably suited to be a mass anti-imperialist organization with a vets and GI base and focus.

A second major reason for this concept in VVAW/WSO of 'we are the whole movement' or of VVAW/WSO developing into some new type of 'vanguard form' stems from a general attitude we can term 'imperialism-in-the-sky.' As was pointed out in the discussion of the united front, organizations in the anti-imperialist movement do not develop as real peoples' movements because of some abstract desire on the part of the organization's membership to 'bear witness' against imperialism. Rather they develop out of the concrete conditions affecting the day-to-day lives of their constituencies. People don't organize against something merely to complain about how bad it is; they don't want to shine a light in the face of US imperialism to prove how ugly it is. Rather, they want to smash it and end the particular oppression it is causing them. As the crisis facing US imperialism inevitably intensifies, the oppressive conditions facing working people in this country will correspondingly increase. It is around those particular conditions facing a given group in society that they should be organized around; that point that the system oppresses the most. The GI movement developed out of resistance to the war and the racism and repression of the military. The rising workers' movement develops from exploitation at the work-site, and on and on it goes.

If using Dimitrov's words, these "united organs" for struggle do not grow out of people's daily lives, "at the enterprises" or around that primary contradiction of the imperialist system which oppresses them, they simply will not have the endurance and militance necessary to see the struggle through to completion. Rather it will become diffuse, halfhearted and inevitably falter. The enemy will forever be hazy, nebulous and illdefined. To those organized around their own point of oppression by the imperialist system, this is much less likely to happen. It's hard to forget who the enemy is when you are forced to face it every day of your life.

The logic of why VVAW/WSO shouldn't try to recruit everybody naturally flows from this understanding. If we do, we will end up drawing people, (or attempting to), away from where they should be; from the struggle closest to their lives, from the one they would be most effective in. If we encourage all people to join the same mass organization, by definition, they cannot be organized around their particular source of oppression under the system. Instead of creating a tight organization with a readily identifiable constituency that really fights for what its members really need, this will blunt the struggle, make it flabby, less militant and fragmented. This is not to say that workers or students, etc., should not join a veteran's organization. But it is to say that it is not always best for the general anti-imperialist movement that they do so. Depending on the particular conditions, it may, in fact, be best for the movement and for the individual that they organize not as veterans but as workers, students, etc. around worker or student issues--as the case may be.

The final source of this problem stems from the status of the movement today. It is comparatively young and underdeveloped, without numerous organizational examples of how a united front develops and works. VVAW/WSO, in many areas developed in a virtual political vacuum where we were the only progressive political organization in a given area. In other cases, VVAW/WSO was forced into an attitude of 'going it

alone' due to the opportunistic maneuverings of such groups as PL, SWP, etc. Also there is a source for this idea of 'we are the movement' or for 'vanguardism' in organizational chauvinist attitudes that many VVAW/WSO members formerly had. As sort of a superstar in the anti-war movement in our early days, we were told by everybody that we were the greatest, and could do no wrong. In a few cases at least, members ended up believing such nonsense. Hopefully, we have grown far beyond such chauvinistic attitudes by 1974.

Another tendency within VVAW/WSO that must be struggled against is the idea that doing any work around bread and butter veterans' issues is incorrect. Partially this position may come from certain guilt feelings many members have about having served in Vietnam. (While it's one thing for Vietnam vets to feel ashamed of having been manipulated and used in the government's genocidal war in Indochina they should not feel guilt-ridden; the war was not their responsibility. While much less than the Indochinese people, the Vietnam vet was also very much a victim of that war.) More frequently, however, the position put forth against any work on bread and butter veterans' issues is that it would 'separate veterans from workers and other people.'

In either case, this is an incorrect position. If followed, we would be failing to take up the very real fight veterans have around their special needs and link it with the general anti-imperialist movement. Whether or not we work in it, the veteran's movement does exist; it is an objective fact. It is spontaneously developing, around the VA, around discrimination at the job site due to bad discharges, etc. on an almost daily basis. Not to go to this struggle and fight for the bread and butter demands that veterans rightfully deserve would be a grave error. Not only does it isolate anti-imperialists from the vets' movement and fail to bring that struggle into the overall attack on US imperialism, but it leaves the field wide open for the opportunists and professional careerists to take the vets' movement up one blind alley after another; the American Legion, VFW, AVM, etc. It is no less correct for us to lead the struggle of vets fighting discrimination caused by a less-than-honorable discharge or for better medical treatment from the VA than it is for workers to demand higher wages or social security benefits. It is simply a matter of making the anti-imperialist struggle relevant to people's lives; not some nebulous concept off in the clouds.

The flip side of this ultra-left position of not dealing at all with bread and butter veterans' issues, is that of wanting to deal exclusively with them. This position holds that the veterans' movement must be strictly limited to the particular needs of veterans as a 'special interest group.' It holds that the veteran's movement should be 'apolitical', not linked up to the anti-imperialist struggle; not linked to anything but purely veterans' issues. It holds that any demands other than purely 'veterans demands' will weaken the chances of winning any reforms around vets' real needs. Obviously, this position has attracted swarms of cold-blooded opportunists, like so many maggots clinging to overly ripe meat. (See the August WS editorial on this.) But there are also many honest people that have not seen where such a position ultimately leads; how strictly reformist demands can only deal with the symptom and not the real problem. Speaking to these honest elements, the June-July editorial in Winter Soldier stated:

"The issue of the many problems facing veterans in the United States has been given a great deal of publicity. Unfortunately, all too often the solutions put forth

to solve these problems are ones that view the struggles of veterans for a better way of life in utter isolation from the rest of the American people. VVAW/WSO feels that this is a very serious mistake. Veterans, and the problems facing them, are not separate from the rest of society. While vets clearly have particular needs and demands, we cannot allow the fight to obtain them to be carried out in isolation from the fight to solve the many problems facing the whole country.

"Indeed, the problems facing the American people today, veterans and non-veterans alike, are directly a result of the system of imperialism we are all forced to live under. If it were not for our involvement in Indochina, there would be no Vietnam veterans in need of vets' benefits in the first place. Thus, demanding veterans' benefits without tying these demands into the struggle against imperialism and the root cause of veterans' problems, is like putting a band-aid on a cancerous sore. Veteran reforms can be won and should be fought for; but the struggle must be carried out in a united effort with the rest of the American people against the common enemy-- US imperialism.

"Advocating strictly veteran reformist demands that do not tie the issues into the larger struggle of the American people against imperialism will lead the veteran's movement up the same blind alley that traditional veterans' organizations have followed for over fifty years. We cannot put the so-called 'interests' of veterans ahead of the interests of the rest of the people in this country: Veterans are an inseparable part of US society and their interests and welfare are the same as the rest of the American people. Reformist veterans demands are not going to stop another war in Indochina! While we must continue to struggle for a solution to the very real problems facing vets...for the right of decent medical care, disability compensation, education, jobs, housing, and so forth--the struggle must be carried out with the understanding all people in the US have these same rights."

Proof of the position that veterans' issues cannot be raised in a strictly reformist manner separated from everything else comes from our own experience in discharge upgrading projects. Here is a clear example of how a strictly service-oriented mentality will achieve next to nothing in the way of results. If all we are doing is preparing appeals for badly discharged vets we may as well forget it. We know beforehand that the boards only hear a handful of cases each year and that only a fraction of these are ever upgraded. Unless the approach to discharge upgrading is thoroughly political, raising the demand for amnesty and a single-type discharge, the project makes no sense whatsoever. It will neither help the half million badly discharged veterans or advance the anti-imperialist struggle.

In sum, to advocate strictly reformist veterans' demands, separated from the overall anti-imperialist struggle makes several mistakes:

A. It is objectively lying to the masses of veterans about what is really going on. While opportunists such as AVM may rant and rave about a so called, 'national veterans' crisis' there is in reality no such thing. There is, however, a very real crisis facing US imperialism. It has lost in Indochina just as it is losing in much of the Third World. As imperialism continually loses ground, it correspondingly increases the repression of all working people here inside the US. The very real problems that veterans do face in this country are but one facet of this growing crisis of imperialism. The real struggle must be waged against the problem--imperialism--

and not its symptoms.

B. It is a position that separates vets from their real allies: working people, the unemployed and all people struggling against US imperialism. As a 'special interest' group only dealing with vets' issues, veterans cannot link up their struggle with these allies. But as part of the united efforts of all people struggling against imperialism veterans can incredibly strengthen their movement.

C. A strictly reformist position inevitably ends up failing to rely and concentrate on the primary strengths of the veterans' movement: the united, militant mass action of the people. Instead this position will see the Congress, the VA, etc. as the primary focus of activity and it will see mass action as only serving as a pressure factor on these institutions. Not only does this fail to build the people's movement, it can never achieve any real victories either. Real victories in the veterans' movement can only be won by fighting for them. We must force the implementation of veteran's demands, not ask or try to pressure the VA or Congress to grant them to us.

This section of the paper deals with the questions of what becoming a mass anti-imperialist organization with a veterans and GI base and focus would mean.

1. Should we stop recruiting non-veterans or throw non-vets out of the organization? No. We are saying that we should focus our organizing work on vets and GIs; people who see the need for this work should be welcomed with open arms. Being a veteran is not a prerequisite. In the GI movement, for one example, many of the most effective organizers historically have been people who were neither GIs nor veterans.

We are not saying that the organization should regress to its pre-Winter Soldier days; we should have learned from the mistakes of that period AND from the mistakes we have made since the change to VVAW/WSO. And we should consolidate what we have learned. The majority of new members, under this concept, would probably be veterans and GIs since we are speaking to their concrete needs and interests. But we want--and should recruit--non-vets who want to join in the anti-imperialist struggle through work around vet and GI issues.

2. Would this change cause us to lose members? Yes, it probably would. It would cause us to lose some honest members whose primary interests are not with the struggles of vets and GIs; although these people would be "lost" to VVAW/WSO, they would not be lost to the anti-imperialist movement, because they would either find or develop those organizations which could best fight imperialism around their particular needs. Because they would be part of the united front against imperialism, they would not, in a larger sense, be "lost" to VVAW/WSO at all.

We would also lose those people for whom the struggle against imperialism is the vague "imperialism in the sky" without direct relation to the everyday real struggles of the masses of people. For these present members of VVAW/WSO, urgent, vigorous, militant struggle around immediate issues has no appeal and they would leave the organization.

3. Isn't this change just what the Revolutionary Union wants us to do? Yes, to a great extent. But the RU is not the only organization which sees us as an organization with a veterans and GI base and focus--so does Nixon, the Democratic Party (remember the attempts to get us to organize "vets for McGovern?"), the National Council of Churches, the CPUSA, NCUUA, the PRG, the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, and on and on. What is primary, however, is not who supports the veterans and GI focus of the organization; what is primary is whether that direction will move VVAW/WSO and the anti-imperialist struggle forward in the most effective possible way. In short, it's not who puts a line forward, but what the line is.

The position advocated in this paper is the position of the VVAW/WSO national collective; we advocate these changes because we believe they point the direction the organization should move, for the reasons given throughout this paper. We feel the important questions about this paper are political--is the analysis of our organizational history correct? Have we drawn the right lessons from our past practice? Have we accurately identified bad tendencies in the organization and would these

tendencies, if continued, lessen or destroy our effectiveness? We believe that it is around questions such as these that the future of the organization should be discussed.

4. What does this mean in terms of national projects of the organization? First, it means that we make a clear distinction between projects and those issues which we support (along the lines of what we called an endorsement at the Milwaukee NSCM). A national program or project which focuses on veteran or GI issues, in the context of anti-imperialism, should be organized by VVAW/WSO. As with the demonstration in Washington, we should ask other anti-imperialist organizations to support and build these projects and programs, but not ask other groups to take such projects on as their primary organizing responsibility. At the same time, we should support (endorse) those anti-imperialist struggles organized by other groups--for example, the struggle of the Farmworkers. We should also support, on a national basis, struggles which, though they are organized on a local basis, need national support--for instance, the Lawton/Gardner trial or the Leavenworth Brothers.

As exemplified by Operation County Fair, we should not undertake projects which diffuse the focus of the organization; OCF showed that we do not have the capability of organizing a project around poor healthcare in the rural south--nor should we take on that kind of project. If a community group in Bogue Chitto were organizing the project, strong chapters in that area of the country could and should support such a project which grew out of the needs of the people. The national organization could be asked to support the project through sending equipment or doing publicity. But it is not the task of VVAW/WSO to organize such a project.

With a clear organizational focus on veterans and GIs comes a limited scope for national projects and programs. Active support of other projects or programs should continue as part of the united front against imperialism.

5. Does this mean we work only on veteran and GI issues? No. It means that our organizing work would be done around these issues. To do this work in the context of anti-imperialism means that we would also work on and support other anti-imperialist struggles. Specifically, it means we would continue to actively support the truckers, or the Borden strikers, or the Harlin County coal miners, or the Attica Brothers; we would not organize these struggles. In terms of our prison project, we would continue to do veterans' work in prisons (DUP's, for instance) or GI work in the case of Leavenworth Disciplinary Barracks, and we would continue to help in the struggles of prisoners around the country to organize and unify inside their prisons.

It certainly does not mean that we would give up our active support of the peoples of Indochina nor does it mean that our support would in any way lessen. As one of the few organizations which continues to stress the fact the war is still going on, we would not stop in our struggle for final implementation of the agreements, and for the freedom and independence of the Indochinese. Again in the context of anti-imperialism, we would continue to support the struggles of people around the world for liberation from U. S. imperialism.

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GIs

Overall, our work among GIs has increased dramatically since the last NSCM, both at the National GI Project Offices and among GI chapters. Prior to the July demo several projects on the east coast were visited by the people from both Project offices. Members from the Dayton office visited the Defense Committee in Norfolk, Virginia, and did outreach work to build for the demo. One of the people from the Chicago office made a two-week trip to bases further south, including Ft Bragg, Charleston, and Camp Lejeune. (Details of these trips will be reported in the GI workshop.) In Japan, the Yokosuka Chapter of VVAW/WSO has been devoting most of the energy recently to setting up a defense committee for the sailors from the USS MIDWAY who recently walked off the ship. On June 30th, they sponsored another outdoor concert which was attended by several hundred GIs. In Iwakuni, Japan, the chapter there has recently been petitioning and leafletting in support of the Korean people who are resisting the dictatorship of Pak Jung Hee. In Heidelberg, Germany, GIs are beginning to form a chapter and the people at the GI center and the people who publish FIGHT BACK sponsored a gathering on July 6th in solidarity with the demands being raised in Washington, DC. Work around the US Disciplinary Barracks at Leavenworth, Kansas, has been on the increase, with the Dayton Office coordinating most of the work in that area. Problems with communication in and out of the prison have come up in the last few months and the authorities there have refused to allow Winter Soldier to be sent in, even though we have written permission from the Commander. As was pointed out in the national newsletter, we see the USDB as a very important focal point in work among GIs. (Details of the work around the USDB will be elaborated in the GI workshop.)

The National GI Conference that was called by the NSC at the last meeting for Labor Day has been rescheduled. The Denver Chapter had originally volunteered to host the Conference and do the necessary pre-conference work. In the last few months, however, the Denver chapter has found itself unable to carry out its commitment due to a number of problems. Given the importance of this conference, we feel that the Denver chapter should be criticized for taking on a task that it was not able to complete. The lack of work that had been done forced us to re-schedule the conference, forcing a number of people in other organizations to miss the conference due to prior arrangements they had made for time off work. Immediately after the DC demo, the National Collective and representatives from the GI offices met to discuss the GI Conference. After members of the Chicago Chapter agreed to work on the conference, we decided to move the Conference to Chicago; we also moved the date to mid-October to give people in the GI Movement (including ourselves) more time to prepare. Another item discussed at this meeting was changing the format of GI NEWS from a newsletter to an 8-page newspaper. We felt that both the style and the lower cost of newsprint made the new format more desirable for building activity among GIs. The first issue will come out during the latter part of August. With the new format, we see a much wider distribution, and we hope that chapters will begin doing regular outreach near military bases in conjunction with selling Winter Soldier.

FUTURE GI WORK

We base our analysis on the fact that GIs are oppressed and the fact that the US military is a major tool of imperialism. We feel that GIs should not just be organized for the sake of organizing against their own immediate oppression, but against the entire role of the US military as a tool of imperialism. We're not just interested

higher degree of continuity to our organization's campaign.

It is important to realize that these demonstrations/actions can only be viewed as the "high points" of our work to put our demands before the American people. Because of this, these demonstrations will mean very little if they are not integrated into our day-to-day work on the chapter level. Many chapters have relied solely on DUPs as the means to carry out daily work, but DUP can only be a part of our work around these five demands. Selling Winter Soldier, setting up picket lines, leafletting on a consistent basis, door-to-door petitioning campaigns, setting up tables and doing outreach at areas where vets and GIs are likely to be found, media blitzes, things like the VA "shit list," educational fund-raisers and film showings, raising our demands in coalition work, getting out agitational propaganda in any way possible; all these tactics must be employed to give breadth to an anti-imperialist campaign around our demands. As an example, a table could be set up at an unemployment office that would be staffed several times a week. This would give us an opportunity to engage people--especially unemployed vets--in conversation and give out literature. Another idea would be to sell Winter Soldier at a VA on a regular--basis--same time every week. Again, this would provide the means by which to talk with people. All of these are merely suggestions. What is important is to see the need for consistent work in reaching out to people.

Building for actions like these we have suggested can enhance our day-to-day work to a point where the two types of activity are inseparable, and this is how it should be. It is true that our day-to-day, grass-roots work is the basis of VVAW/WSO and it is this sort of practice that reveals what we are as an organization. But at the same time, actions planned to compliment this daily work will prove that we are a fighting organization, determined to take our demands before the people of this country. The two aspects of a yearly program (visible actions and daily work around our demands) will have to go hand-in-hand. They must be closely integrated, and carrying out one aspect of this program in isolation from the other will not be nearly as effective as concentrating on both aspects at the same time.

With regard to carrying out a national program, it is important to point out the necessity of developing good styles of work. We must thoroughly grasp the lessons of the Washington demonstration because if we make the same mistakes in our future work, we will be holding back the struggle against imperialism. We again stress that there is a big difference between the attitude of "anti-imperialism in the sky" and the realization that the fight against imperialism is a life and death struggle. This latter attitude should be the one which guides all of our work. If we do not approach our work with the understanding that peoples' lives are at stake, then we will lose the support of the people we are trying to reach and come off as a bunch of elitists.

To better improve our methods of work, we must sharpen our ability to analyze our various activities, particularly the mistakes we make. Only through analyzing our work can we then learn to improve it and make it more effective. An example of how we should learn from our work is the disparity between the success Milwaukee has had in their actions at the VA in drawing in new members (primarily veterans), and the lack of response among vets that New York City has met with in their actions at the VA. We must analyze our actions such as this, learn where we are making mistakes and correct them. We must begin to develop ways in which

were also problems with getting relief for people when shifts changed, but this was a by-product of not having lists of people who would work on the teams; these lists are vital to have at the next major demonstration.

In summing up the role of the various support teams, we feel that it is essential to define these teams as to how they fit into the structure of the demonstration. All of the support teams -- medical, commo, security, cooking, camp administration -- should be looked at as service teams. That is to say that these services are for the benefit of the people at the demonstration and as such, should be seen in the light of being under the leadership of the NSC.

There was a tendency for some of the people on the support teams to view themselves as APART from the demonstration. For example, on one occasion, the radio operator for one of the tactical leaders of a march was walking 100 feet ahead of him talking to herself. The radio operator should have been at the side of the tactical leader. That is where they are needed. If an emergency communication was to have been made, there could have been incredible disorder. It should be pointed out that on the last day this situation was rectified and the commo team did an excellent job of providing service. This rule should apply to all the support teams.

Another question around the service teams is that they should be headed up by competent people whose sole job is to organize the people working on the team. For the most part this was done, but several times people working in these areas assumed other responsibilities and as a result had to divide their time between providing leadership for the overall demonstration and providing leadership for a particular support team. These "independent" leaders of the support teams have enough work cut out for them and they should not have to be burdened with other duties. Conversely, leadership of the demonstration should not have to be burdened with assuming support work duties.

One other point should be made about the general relationship of the demonstration and the support teams. In terms of making political, tactical decisions, it is important that input from support teams be listened to, but that in the final analysis, the leadership of the demonstration should make the ultimate tactical decision, based on the spirit of the demonstrators. On several occasions, support team leaders objected to the tactical decisions made. While this is admirable in that the concern for their particular team was foremost, it is not always the most correct political decision.

Overall, we feel that support people responded in an outstanding manner throughout the entire demonstration. The support teams were faced with overwhelming difficulties, i. e. the heat, lack of sleep, numerous medical emergencies, faulty equipment, etc. In spite of this, they did provide the service that was necessary to carry on the demonstration. For this we, as an organization, should be proud. Throughout the years, we have gotten better and better in holding major demonstrations. Based on the practice of logistical people at this demonstration, we see the next one flowing more smoothly and expertly.

UNITY - STRUGGLE - VICTORY!

Building Actions

Building for the national action in Washington was done in a programmatic, unified way. It marked the first time that the organization has done this in any real way -- tying the demands of the demonstration to our on-going work of our chapters. We began building for the action in January and the building was part of a strategy of action for the organization (i. e. at Yellow Springs, we talked about building DUPs as part of building for the demonstration). Materials used for building the action were drawn up so that they would fit easily into that strategy and this strategy was basically carried out in a unified way around the country. We think that overall this was a big step for the organization to take and that it was successful.

There are several points, however, that should be brought up. It is important for us to understand that building for a major demonstration should not be seen apart from the day-to-day work of the chapter. In order to use a building action successfully, it is imperative that the action be based in an area where there has been day-to-day work beforehand, and where the exposure of the organization and our demands can reach people who can be won over to them. It would be useless or futile to have a demonstration in a city 50 miles away from an active chapter.

We think that the type of demonstrations that were most successful were the ones held in Milwaukee and Cincinnati. Milwaukee's regional action was a take-over of the VA followed by a car caravan throughout the city focusing on the five demands and putting them forward as part of the overall strategy. In Cincinnati, the chapters marched through three miles of the city and ended with a rally. These actions were not apart from the chapters' daily work. In both cities, these had been done before and will be done again, but they did build for the demonstration.

We feel that there should have been more building actions and that in the future the NSCM must recognize the importance of these actions based on our practice and knowing how we added to our strategy towards the end of June. Many chapters felt that it was necessary to have another building demonstration. For instance, the New York City chapter felt that it was vital to have a demonstration in the city, in addition to participating in the regional demo at West Point. (This was done because the West Point demo was not an integral part of their daily work). They then took over the VA regional office one week prior to July 1. We think that this was very good. In the future, we should plan more demonstrations leading up to the major national one. While we didn't see the necessity for this in Milwaukee at the NSCM, we now see that it is imperative to do this.

We think that the use of the posters and stickers was excellent. The organization pasted up over 175,000 stickers in the two months prior to the demonstration. This too, was a good way to make it known that we were going to Washington. In the future this will be done again, and it could even be handy for chapters to do this regularly around local work.

While some regions did little work around building for the demonstration and some built the demonstration in isolation from the day-to-day work of their chapters, we feel that the organization did well -- we made our points in our communities and

JULY 1-4 DEMONSTRATION ANALYSIS

(We are presenting here a political analysis of how the National Collective viewed the July 1-4 national action in Washington, D. C. While we will briefly comment on the logistical aspects of the organizing that went into the July action, we will concentrate on the larger political issues that emerged from the demonstration).

Overall, the July 1-4 action must be viewed as a resounding success for both VVAW/WSO and for the general anti-imperialist movement. It was the most militant, best organized and led action we've yet held on a national level. It was also the most intense period of struggle the national organization has yet been through in an action situation and the organization grew incredibly as a result of it. In Washington we were basically trying to establish a strong anti-imperialist position, on a national level, in two very important struggles: the movement for universal and unconditional amnesty and the rising veterans' movement. (While these two movements obviously dovetail very closely with each other, they should be viewed separately). Both of these struggles are faced with the difficult task of being led as part of the general anti-imperialist movement and not as narrow reformist movements that do not tie into the larger questions surrounding the very nature of our system.

We were successful in both these accounts in our actions in D. C. The issue of universal and unconditional amnesty and the demand for amnesty for veterans was raised in D. C. in a manner that those concerned with the national amnesty movement will have great difficulty ignoring. Similarly, the development of the anti-imperialist veterans' movement took a big step forward in Washington and dealt a severe blow to the opportunist-misleaders of the veterans' movement who have done their best to see that the vets' movement remains impotent and incapable of winning real victories for veterans. These are the so-called veterans' groups that consciously strive to see that vets don't deal with their primary source of oppression, U. S. imperialism, but just try to get a few handouts here and there from the VA.

More than anything else, the July demo showed the need for a militant, fighting anti-imperialist organization focusing on the needs of vets and GIs. It also showed that VVAW/WSO was well suited to become that organization. We saw that the militance of the demonstrators in Washington was qualitatively greater than in any of our previous actions. During the conduct of the demonstration, we consistently found that when we relied on our primary strength, the united, militant mass action of the people, that we could win really important victories. We also found that most of the major mistakes we made in Washington occurred precisely because we didn't rely on the people but became overly concerned with purely external forces, police, courts, etc, and failed to let our initiative be determined by mass action. It is upon this militance that we must build our movement and our organization in the future.

While it was obviously not reflective of all regions in D. C., the primary failure of the July action was seen to lie with the inability of some regional leadership to truly reflect the militance of their regional contingent. Some regional lead-

We feel that if chapters approached the question of bad discharges from the standpoint of a "campaign for a single-type discharge" that we could avoid stagnation. DUPs should be looked at as only one part of the campaign. The major focus should be on organizing -- organizing vets with bad discharges and other people into local activity, such as demonstrations, leafletting, speaking, petitioning, etc. We need to identify for the public the people we are trying to help. Without this public identification, our demand will become weak and meaningless for most Americans. It will be falling into what we have described before as "witnessing against imperialism" rather than fighting against imperialism -- it is "anti-imperialism-in-the-sky" rather than anti-imperialism-in-the-streets. If we think only in terms of processing paperwork, we will only be identifying these vets for ourselves and the government, and not the general public. Without taking these cases off the paper and putting them before the American people, we will only be spinning our wheels.

Many of you will say that we must "flood the boards" with discharge cases. We agree that it can only help to have the boards flooded; but that is only one of the many forms of public pressure. Furthermore, we don't think it is up to VVAW/WSO to do the flooding. Our role should be to provide leadership and an anti-imperialist focus. A quick look at the hundreds of schools and organizations around the country now offering discharge counseling is a good indication of how far the campaign has come, and is also an indication of where the flooding will come from. Discharge upgrading has become such an issue among vets groups, that by the end of the year, virtually every office relating to Vietnam-era vets will be offering some counseling about bad discharges; many already will process the paperwork. The momentum has been created (much to VVAW/WSO's credit). It is now time to evaluate what the conditions are today and develop our strategy from there.

Our evaluation of where we are today suggests that the following points should guide the work of VVAW/WSO's campaign for a single-type discharge in the coming months. Focus on ACTION projects -- petitions at plant gates, unemployment offices; picket lines, selling the paper and the amnesty booklet; and regular demonstrations. Concentrate on organizing people into the campaign, rather than organizing paperwork into Washington. The focus should be ACTION.

For some projects, this may mean cutting back on the number of cases that they are taking on. If you find that you do have to cut back, don't turn anyone away without first thoroughly explaining your local campaign, the political reasons for the campaign and the possibilities for getting involved. In the long run, a chapter will contribute more to eliminating the bad discharge system if it relies on 20 vets with bad discharges actively working in a local campaign, than if it exhausts the chapter preparing 100 cases that will only sit on someone's desk in Washington for a year.

Raise the imperialist political nature of the bad discharge system. In all of our work, we should be constantly pointing out how the bad discharge is used as a disciplinary measure to keep enlisted people in line. It should also be pointed out that the U. S. is one of the few countries in the world that has a multiple discharge system. Now that more and more groups are realizing the need for a universal upgrading of all bad discharges, it is even more important for us to expose the whole discharge system for what it is. The more people who understand the reasons for bad discharges and how the discharge system comes down hardest on work-

AMNESTY

Last December, we began our national strategy around universal and unconditional amnesty. At the Antioch, Ohio NSCM, we laid out a program that would carry us through June with a national demonstration in Washington, D. C. in early July. We decided at that time that organizing GIs and badly discharged veterans would be the primary focus. This would be done by beginning discharge upgrading projects, using them as an educational tool in which to discuss amnesty and the need for it. At the Milwaukee NSCM, we decided on the dates, the demands, and the general scenario for the national action and regional actions to be held in May.

What occurred during the first seven months of the year was generally an overall success. Many chapters began the discharge upgrading projects, there were many regional and chapter actions for amnesty, and there was a general recognition that focusing on the less-than-honorably discharged veterans was a good thing. The five demands adopted at the Milwaukee meeting gave an overall anti-imperialist focus to the work and the originally planned demonstration in Washington became a focus for the work that chapters did during the first seven months of this year.

One of the most controversial demands of the amnesty campaign was the universal, unconditional amnesty demand. Many people reported that this demand was the one that drew the most interest and the most questions. We think that this was also good. In linking universal, unconditional amnesty with the other demands, we were able to talk about amnesty and show its connections to the other demands. This was evidenced by the outstanding success of the Washington, D. C. demonstration.

We feel that the work done during the past seven months should continue. Included in this National Office report is a section on the summing up of the practice of the DUPs, which we feel should also continue. In putting forward and linking up the universal and unconditional amnesty demand with the other four used at the demonstration in July, we feel that we can best put forward our anti-imperialist work in a tight, politically correct way. We also see that the practice of the chapters by focusing on the less-than-honorably discharged veterans is the best way to fight for all of these demands.

We should not look at the demonstration in Washington as being the culmination of our amnesty work. It was the culmination of the first phase of the national strategy. In fact, our work continues and we believe that the best way to continue this is to put forward the demands in a series of demonstrations that are outlined in another section of this National Office Report.

Our demonstration in Washington proved that we can put forward anti-imperialist demands, focusing on amnesty, the war, veterans, and Nixon and his class, in a strong and militant way through continued unified action. This is the best way that we can continue to build the anti-imperialist amnesty movement.

As time passed, more new people joined the committee and it became clear that the majority of these new people were either CP members or sympathizers. These people did nothing in the way of real day-to-day work to defend the brothers, but they did begin raising the question of having the committee affiliate with the Alliance. VVAW/WSO members on the committee opposed this idea (because they were familiar with the Alliance's practice around Gary and Ruchell) but at a meeting when some of the VVAW/WSO members were out of town, a vote was taken and the committee affiliated with the Alliance. In essence, what had happened was that the CP had packed the committee so that the votes were under control. On top of this, the pro-Alliance faction of the committee began to race-bait VVAW/WSO members by saying that the LBODC and VVAW/WSO should no longer share the same office because VVAW/WSO cannot relate to black people. (They said this knowing that all of the Leavenworth Brothers are members of VVAW/WSO!) As a result of tactics like these, the committee became split into two factions (VVAW/WSO and pro-CP) and left the less political, independent members of the committee with a great deal of confusion.

Since the affiliation, the brothers themselves have found it necessary to enter the struggle against their defense committee's involvement with the Alliance. They are very much aware that the only people doing on-going work around their defense are VVAW/WSO members and "independent" people. The pro-Alliance faction, for the most part, has not even found the time to move to Wichita where the trials are going on and where the defense committee is now centered. The brothers are preparing a statement condemning the practice of the Alliance around their particular case. They are painfully aware that since the affiliation took place, neither the Alliance, nor the CP, have done one concrete thing to defend them; their "advocates" on the committee have done nothing to build a movement around the brothers in an on-going way; and the brothers are fed up with hearing that the Alliance is traveling around claiming to be deeply involved with seeing that these brothers are freed. Once again, as with the case of Lawton and Gardner and Ruchell Magee, the Leavenworth Brothers have heard many promises but nothing in the way of concrete work has appeared. They view their affiliation with the Alliance as nothing but a hype for the Alliance and the Party, and they feel that as honest elements, they are rapidly being sold down the river.

What does this all mean for VVAW/WSO? And more importantly, what does it mean for the struggle against imperialism and the mass movement in this country? VVAW/WSO cannot ignore opportunism, especially when it directly affects our work. The CP is clearly using the struggles of prisoners and political repression cases to build themselves up, but at the expense of those brothers and sisters whose lives are on the line. We have done an excellent job of working around political repression in a very principled way, and this is witnessed by the respect we have won from Gary Lawton and the Leavenworth Brothers. In contrast, Gary, Ruchell and the Leavenworth Brothers have nothing but obscenities to offer when discussing their experiences with the CP and the Alliance.

The CP and Alliance have done little in the way of direct support and work for those people that they claim they are defending. What this does is confuse people and divides them against each other. The race-baiting used against VVAW/WSO in the LBODC is a clear example of how far the CP will go in dividing people and confusing the struggle.

be discussed here. It is important, however, to give an over-view of the types of trials that we are working on around the country. On a national level, work around the trial of Gary Lawton and Zurebu Gardner is continuing, and the interest which was generated last December around this trial has remained and the organization as a whole is relating in a much more concrete manner to this national project. Gary has continued to do speaking gigs around the country whenever he was able to get away from trial preparations in Riverside, and Gary's speaking gigs have done much to inspire regions to raise the racism and repression of this trial in more day-to-day ways than was ever done before. Hopefully, this kind of work and a continual raising of the issues involved in this frame-up will continue through the approaching third trial.

Other trials which the organization is heavily involved in include the Leavenworth Brothers -- a series of trials being worked on by chapters in Kansas and Missouri. These trials involve VVAW/WSO members, both as defendants and as defense personnel; and for this reason, plus the fact that these trials are very important for the prison movement, have made chapters around the country take an interest in and closely follow the events of these trials. Also, work around Bob Hood continues at a high level, particularly in the Bay Area of California, and though Bob's trial is basically a local issue it is important to realize that the national organization is involved because the arrest and charging of Hood is just one more in a series of attacks on VVAW/WSO.

In other parts of California, the San Jose chapter has taken the lead in working for the freeing of Ruchell Magee and a growing, coalition effort for defense has been initiated in that area. Ruchell's trial is definitely of national importance and other chapters may wish to examine the way in which they can best plug into this effort to obtain Ruchell's freedom. Another local defense committee has been formed by the Santa Barbara chapter which is defending a federal prison, Al Glatkowski, imprisoned because of the hijacking of the Columbia Eagle in Cambodia. Al is organizing the VVAW/WSO chapter in Lompoc Prison and his case may turn out to be very important -- both for the prison movement and the amnesty movement. We hope to get more information on this case out in the near future.

Other trials that the organization is working on in a support capacity include the Attica Brothers and the Houston 12, while work around Karl Armstrong is still being done in Wisconsin. The National Office has continued to keep informed of many other major trials going on around the country -- Wounded Knee, Martin Sostre, the San Quentin 6, etc. and many of the above-mentioned trials have been reported on in Winter Soldier. The information we have is available to any chapter or region upon request; also, we hope that regions will keep us informed of the trials and political repression cases that are being worked on, as well as any new political cases that may arise in the future. With the completion of the National Defense Committee packet, the effectiveness of our defense work should be increased and an understanding of the importance of working on certain trials will be maximized.

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or qualifications, start a chapter and represent the organization. We should consider guidelines for membership, and guidelines for chapters. We are a political organization, and the exercise of internal organizational discipline is essential.

The NO does not have the solutions to these problems; we have no concrete proposals to bring to a workshop. We do think we have to start discussing these problems and finding solutions. This is why we propose a workshop on internal organization be added to the agenda, and that ideas from this workshop be taken back for discussion in chapters and regions.

there be a workshop on internal organizing which should begin to discuss questions like what is a chapter, what is a member, and what degree of organizational discipline should we exercise.

Because the situation in Florida is the most glaring example of the problems which can appear under our present loose organizational guidelines, we use that as an example. According to our chapter list, we have eight chapters in Florida. Of these, six do not exist at all--we have written to them from the NO, and the regional office has tried to contact them. There has been no reply. Then there is a group of people in Tampa, and finally, the South Florida chapter (Miami and Ft Lauderdale).

First, the story of Tampa (abridged); Tampa has, for the past eight months, refused to work within the Florida region. Its coordinator, Carl Brown, has not been honest with the NO and, worse, with the people in the chapter. Information from other people in Tampa makes it obvious that information from the NO does not get to the membership, and what does get through is badly distorted. In preparation for the DC demonstration, Carl Brown became a coordinator for AVM, organizing for their demonstration; while in Washington he stayed at the AVM office. When he did appear at the Mall, he was confronted by people from the Florida region and specifically people from Tampa and was thrown out of the campsite.

Several people from Tampa have talked to the NO about trying to build a chapter in Tampa, one which would be a VVAW/WSO chapter (not VVAW as Carl Brown puts forth), and would follow the programs laid out by the NSC. As yet, nothing has come of these attempts. We believe that there may be a Tampa chapter of AVM; there is no VVAW/WSO chapter.

Finally, the situation in Miami. While this report was being written there was a phone call from Miami which contradicted what was already a confusing situation report--in other words, the primary aspect of the Miami/South Florida chapter at this time is confusion, with different factions giving entirely different versions of what is going on. To give one example: The Miami Herald quotes Scott Browne, who is identified as the Miami coordinator, as saying "We are constitutionalists. Frankly, I don't know if we're a right-wing organization or a left-wing organization these days." Scott Browne says that he was misquoted; another faction from Miami says that the quote is substantially correct.

Summing up, there is no VVAW/WSO organization in Florida. We are only kidding ourselves to say that one exists. There are honest people in Florida who are interested in building VVAW/WSO; we cannot and should not forget them. This is true in Tampa and around the region, though with the present reputation of VVAW/WSO in the state, recruiting honest leadership who will work to build the organization in Florida.

Florida is just a blatant example of the results of our present structure. The NSC must have and use the power to create and dissolve regions. We believe that the NSC should begin to look toward the day when NSC representatives go into a region to help that region build, or at least spend sufficient time in a region to watch the practice and make recommendations to the NSC before that region is accepted as part of the national organization. The time has passed when we, as an organization, can be so liberal as to let any person, no matter what his or her politics, background,

tionship with the Communist Party, USA has not been what it should. Given the complexity of the subject, it will be gone into in some detail further on in this report. Clearly, the most serious problems we've had with other organizations in recent months have been with the so-called American Veterans Movement. The National Office external report to the Milwaukee NSCM first raised the issue of AVM's reactionary role in the veterans' movement. At that time, AVM was successfully masquerading as a "progressive" veterans organization, gaining an incredible hype from the straight media and even a helping hand from a lot of movement organizations that were not aware of AVM's real role. Just about every word written in that report about AVM's reactionary leadership was borne out in practice during our July demonstration in Washington. There, AVM unsuccessfully tried to pimp off of the rising veterans' movement and, more directly, off of the demonstration VVAW/WSO was organizing. While they naturally continued to get the full support of the establishment press, AVM was totally revealed to the people for just what they are: cold-blooded opportunists. Most of our position on AVM and groups like them can be found in the editorial we wrote on the veterans' movement in the August Winter Soldier. While AVM was utterly exposed in D. C. as out and out opportunists with no base and no program, that is not to say that other groups will not quickly rise to fill their shoes. This has been the history of the veterans' movement since its inception. VVAW/WSO must constantly guard against this reactionary tendency in the veterans' movement wherever it is being pushed from -- either by the AVM, the American Legion, the VFW or whomever.

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NATIONAL OFFICE REPORT

13th VVAW-WSO

NATIONAL STEERING
COMMITTEE MEETING

August 8-12



BUFFALO, NY

we made our point in Washington. We learned most clearly that what happened over the past seven months was that we had a program of work, that it was carried out in a unified way and that this is the only way that we can continue to put forward our demands as part of our daily work.

Logistics

Planning for the July action began well in advance of the demonstration itself. Several months prior to it, the National Office drew up a list of jobs that were seen as being necessary to lay the logistical groundwork for the action. These six jobs were: 1) scenario/liaison; 2) press; 3) administration/speakers; 4) food/equipment; 5) commo/medical/campsite organization/security 6) legal/chapter liaison, childcare. Together they formed the general tasks performed by the Demonstration Logistics Committee (DLC). As mandated by the National Steering Committee, the National Office picked the members of the DLC in April and May.

The six people picked for the DLC office in Washington had been fully briefed as to what their actual role and tasks would be. In addition to having prior experience in the particular job they were picked to fulfill, they understood that their role was solely that of logistical support and not overall demonstration leadership. During our last national action (Gainesville), the people laying the groundwork for the demonstration saw themselves as being the leadership of the actions. In Washington, as opposed to this, it was clearly stated from the beginning that the Washington DLC was not leadership for the demonstration. That was correctly the responsibility of the NSC, and that was the body that did in fact serve as the leadership of the demonstration.

By and large, the National Office feels that this system of organizing a logistics committee to lay the groundwork for a national action was ideal. We felt that this committee with its very specific jobs was exactly what was needed; rather than having an overflowing crowd of people who wanted to work on the demo, as was the case in Gainesville. Despite extremely adverse conditions, things did run very smoothly and efficiently. The incredible work that the members of the DLC did cannot be overstated.

In addition to the six people that made up the DLC, we had planned to pull in other people one week prior to the demonstration to head up specific teams, i. e. . . medical, food, commo. Unfortunately, we were only able to get one person for the commo work. The others that we had contacted couldn't make it. What we need in the future is to have back-up people who can come in to fill vacant slots if necessary. There was one other problem with the committee. The person we had assigned for press work didn't show up and as a result we had press people for only two weeks before the demonstration began. While these two people did a magnificent job, it is clear that working on press should have begun two weeks earlier.

When the demonstration began there was a lot of confusion around setting up the medical teams, etc. This resulted partially from the lack of having someone working on this in advance, and also not having fully understood that it was necessary to have a list of people from the regions who would work on the various support teams. Despite this confusion, teams were set up and they worked hard to do their jobs. There

ership repeatedly tailed behind their people, consistently masking right errors in trying to represent them. Time and time again in Washington this occurred: the people were three steps ahead of their leaders!

In some instances, regional leadership saw its role as being sort of a walking ballot box -- passively taking the votes of its contingent to develop a collective position. This is correctly a task that a voting machine should perform -- it is definitely not the role leadership should see itself in. What is increasingly going to be needed in VVAW/WSO is dynamic, out with the people, primary leadership that can take the initiative and place itself in the vanguard of the struggle.

In other cases, regional leadership objectively tried to tone down the initiative and militance of their people. An example would be those regional leaders that repeatedly pushed a "the cops are gonna get us if we do this and so" line, both in their contingents and during the nightly NSC meetings. Such a position, in addition to needlessly adding more tension to the situation served to cloud the objective conditions we were operating under during the demo. It came basically from a failure to base our actions on a determination of where our people were at, but rather trying to second guess where the "man" was at. The point should have been that we had the initiative during the entire situation, not the "msn."

The most obvious example of another such failure to rely on the people and to concentrate solely on second-guessing the cops occurred on Tuesday night. There, the tactical leadership for the night, which did contain a member of the National Office as well as regional leadership, decided against holding the demo as we left the mall solely on the basis of what they thought the cops were going to do. If we fail to base our plans and actions on our primary strength, the people, we will continue to make such errors.

We need strong, militant regional leadership that will be the vanguard force in leading the fight for our demands. This must be seen as one of the most crucial problems facing VVAW/WSO today. Unless regional leadership is seen in this way, and unless it is up to the task, regions will develop defeatist outlooks or fall into reformism and thereby hold back the initiative of the people and the further growth of the organization.

A few words need to be said on the incredible support we received in building for Washington from a number of other organizations. Much of our success in Washington can be directly attributed to the work these other groups did to build for the action -- in terms of propaganda around it in communities across the nation, material support and actually organizing people to go to D. C. This was the first time VVAW/WSO seriously attempted to have other organizations fully participate in one of our national actions. We organized the demonstration, set up its structure and its political thrust and then asked other groups to fit into that structure. The results of it speak for themselves. When we can have principled unity with other forces we not only should, but must, try to unite with them. The broader the unity we can achieve, the stronger our overall impact will be.

ing class and third world people, the better our chances of eliminating the multiple discharge system entirely. Remember that a single-type discharge is more than just amnesty for those who already have bad discharges; it means abolishing the system entirely.

The final point we would like to raise is the longrange nature of the discharge campaign. One serious political problem that we think could easily arise in the future is that amnesty will be granted with all Vietnam-era bad discharges upgraded, but without abolishing the whole discharge system. If we haven't built a strong campaign by then, we could have the wind taken right out of our sails. Universal amnesty would of course be a great victory, but if we don't prepare ourselves, the granting of amnesty would mean that we would never regain the momentum for abolishing the discharge system. A lot of the momentum right now is coming from people who are not consciously anti-imperialist; they support amnesty for one reason or another, but if amnesty is granted, they won't be sticking around to see the discharge system abolished; neither will the majority of the 500,000 Vietnam-era veterans who will have their discharges upgraded. It would be just like the signing of the Paris Agreement. If everyone in the anti-war movement would have been a conscious anti-imperialist, they would have continued their work in spite of the signing of the Agreement. That's why it's important to develop a conscious anti-imperialist outlook around the discharge system, as well as organizing people into the campaign who are directly affected. We need to do more than just witness against imperialism; we need to build a strong, anti-imperialist campaign to end the bad discharge system. That is the only way we will be able to carry the campaign through to the end, even in the face of amnesty being granted by the government.

BUILD A FIGHTING CAMPAIGN FOR A SINGLE-TYPE DISCHARGE !!!

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NCUUA

NCUUA has been gaining broad-based support for the universal, unconditional amnesty campaigns. Many organizations are still joining and the Steering Committee still meets to discuss the various ways organizations are putting forward their campaigns. The council endorsed our July action and publicized it in their newsletter and in a general mailing. Not many of the groups turned out large numbers of people, but there was participation at the July demo by representatives of many of these groups. For the future, NCUUA has endorsed the Week of Concern, which will occur at the end of September and will focus on the Indochina War and universal, unconditional amnesty. We expect that many of our chapters will participate in some way in the activities of this week, which is being mainly organized by the United Campaign to End the War. We think that it would be a good thing for chapters to participate in the events, focusing as much as possible on our five demands. To do so would be to give an anti-imperialist focus to the week. Chapters in California are planning a demonstration during the week and have invited the United Campaign to End the War to march with them.

One of the continuing problems with NCUUA is that much of the talk is centered around Congressional bills. Since none of the bills are worth salt, and since these groups suffer from relying on Congress and not on the people of this country, certain political problems arise. But, by the very nature of the council, it is in our best interests to continue raising anti-imperialist views on amnesty and work with the NCUUA organizations.

Discharge Upgrading in the Amnesty Campaign

Since the last NSCM, more chapters have taken an interest in discharge upgrading work and many have been successful in integrating new members into chapter work around a single-type discharge. But at the same time, there has also been a lot of discouragement and stagnation within many chapters about their DUP work. Some have found it difficult to get vets with bad discharges to come in; some have found the processing of paperwork to be a time-consuming, mundane task that is hard to interest members in doing; others have had great success in finding vets with bad discharges and processing the paperwork, only to then be faced with a great backlog of cases that will take at least a year to be ruled on.

We think these problems stem from the outlook that chapters have toward DUP work. Discharge upgrading was voted by the Steering Committee to be one of the primary tactics in developing our amnesty campaign and the struggle for a single-type discharge. However, it now appears that many chapters look at DUP as an end in itself -- as the overall strategy, instead of a tactic. Now that we have good concrete programs, many chapters have lost sight of the overall campaign and settled "comfortably" into working on a program -- filling out forms and interviewing people. But as with any anti-imperialist work, if politics are not in command, rather than paperwork, then people will always reach a point of stagnation and eventual discouragement. We think this obstacle can be overcome by re-evaluating the political nature of DUP.

Our organization must begin to expose actions like those of the Alliance and the Party. But we must be principled. We must always have the facts or search them out. We must investigate and challenge the validity of the Alliance. The National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression is a mass organization led by the CP. This is not bad in itself and we are not opposed to communist leadership of mass organizations -- a principled leadership won by good practice. But it is increasingly apparent that the CP is using the Alliance to hype itself and is not doing the work it says it is. This kind of practice presents a clear danger to the movement as a whole because it draws honest people into dishonest organizations. If the CP actually supported the struggles of those they profess to be defending and the various defense committees involved with the Alliance, that would be a good thing. However, since this is clearly not what is happening, VVAW/WSO has a responsibility -- both to the membership of our organization, as well as to all people in the U. S. -- to expose the reactionary role the CP is now playing.

At this time, it would be wrong to condemn the Alliance because there are some honest organizations and people in and involved with the Alliance (i. e. Wounded Knee, Puerto Rican Socialist Party) and we cannot condemn them simply because of the practice of the CP. We would therefore suggest that VVAW/WSO begin to use the tools at our disposal (newsletters, Winter Soldier, internal education, meetings, etc) to expose these practices and the manipulative leadership role the CP is playing within the Alliance, and drag them into the light of day. Let the CP answer if they can. We are not out to trash for trashing's sake. We are out to correct bad practice and identify just who are our friends and who are our enemies.

COMMUNIST PARTY, USA & THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE

VVAW/WSO has always tried to work with other organizations regardless of political ideology that we did not totally agree with, but always demanding a principled relationship. However, it is becoming apparent that the Communist Party, USA and its brainchild, the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, have increasingly used opportunistic practices and down right lies in relation to our work and the movement as a whole. In National Newsletter #26, this office reprinted a letter from Gary Lawton to Angela Davis, blasting her for opportunistically manipulating the life and death struggles that many political prisoners are waging; but this letter is only the tip of a giant iceberg of opportunism.

It is important for people to understand the history behind Gary's letter. When Angela was still in prison, and thousands of people were coming to her defense, the Riverside Political Prisoners Defense Committee, even though it was broke and trying to defend three brothers, decided to split whatever monies it raised three ways. One third went to the defense of Lawton, Cardner and Jackson; one third to the defense of Billy Dean Smith; and one third to the defense of Angela Davis. The RPPDC (in which VVAW/WSO was playing a very large role) thought it important that this be done to show solidarity and link up the struggles of all political prisoners. When Angela learned of this move, she wrote to Gary and promised that when she was free, she would immediately begin to help the three Riverside brothers gain their freedom. The CP also made many promises of money, support work and other activities.

Since her release, Angela has not done one concrete thing for the freeing of Lawton and Gardner; and long before she was freed, the CP had reneged on numerous promises to the RPPDC and VVAW/WSO. Yet, Angela, the CP and the Alliance all claim in their publications and in public speeches that they are doing all sorts of work for Gary and Zurebu. That is what finally prompted Gary to write his letter. Even now, after personally receiving the letter, Angela still claims (in the name of the Alliance) that they are working feverishly on Gary's defense.

The case of Ruchell Magee is even more reprehensible in that it was his revolt against slavery that led to Angela's incarceration. VVAW/WSO has been working on Ruchell's defense for the past few months, and we have received painful letters from him laying out his feelings of being used and deserted by the National Alliance and the CP. Yet, the CP claims in a manner similar to that in Gary's case that they are totally supporting Ruchell and feverishly working on his defense. Again, this is pure opportunism, as we know directly from Ruchell that they are not doing anything. In fact, Angela has not even found the time to visit this valiant brother in her many visits to San Jose.

The clearest example of the opportunist practice of the Alliance and the CP, and their unprincipled relations with VVAW/WSO can be seen by looking at the case of the Leavenworth Brothers. We became involved with the defense of these brothers nearly a year ago and initiated the Leavenworth Brothers Offense/Defense Committee. Shortly after the committee was operating and beginning to build a movement around the brothers, a few CP members began relating to the LBODC.

involved in. In line with this, some of the people that have been in contact with us over the past year are beginning to be released and paroled. They are interested in learning more about the organization and are investigating VVAW/WSO as a group they may wish to work with on a daily basis.

We believe that part of the reason for the increase of "organizational identity" within our prison membership is the prison newsletter, "Inside/Out." Only three newsletters have been sent out, but the response to this publication has been extremely positive. The newsletter has now established itself and enough response and "routine" have developed so that we expect this to be an on-going monthly publication of the Project Office. There has been some confusion as to who this newsletter should be sent to, and we criticize ourselves for not getting the newsletter out to all of those chapters which are doing prison work. Hopefully, problems such as this can be resolved in the prison workshop.

Problems with the National Prison Project stem around a lack of communication between the Project Office and the regional offices. Once again, we must raise the point that we simply do not have a good understanding of the types of prison work that chapters and regions are doing. We know that there is activity, but unless we are informed of it, it is difficult to analyze the success of the project on a regional/chapter level. For example, we know that chapters are interested in getting DUPs inside prisons so that the necessary personal contact can be made. However, we have very little idea as to how these plans are progressing, what problems have arisen, and where in fact, prison DUPs are operating. Because of this, we must again stress the importance of communications from the regional level to the project office, and at the same time, we realize that communications between the Project Office and the regions must also be increased and made more effective.

On the whole, our prison work is progressing very well. We should now begin to sum up where we have been with this project, and the direction that we should be moving toward for the future.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS REPORT

Work around political repression and political trials has been on the rise during the past six months, and this work is being done on local, regional and national levels of the organization. Also, the trials being worked on include those which are of both national and local importance and scope. The form for our defense work includes both VVAW/WSO committees, as well as coalitional efforts to defend political prisoners. We see the increasing support we have been able to provide for political trials as a positive thing, and work which VVAW/WSO should continue to be involved in. As repression heightens in the U. S., more political trials will be arising and many of these will demand our response and/or involvement in some form or another.

Many of the trials that we are currently working on will be discussed separately at this meeting, thus the details as to what is happening with these trials will not

NATIONAL PRISON PROJECT REPORT

It was one year ago, at the St. Louis NSCM, that we began to discuss the possibility of doing some sort of prison work. In this past year, we feel that we have made a great deal of progress, obtained a clear political grasp of the work we are doing, and the Prison Project has grown very rapidly (though not out of hand). We are in regular communication with nearly 100 prisons around the country, and we have several major contacts in the majority of those prisons -- contacts who communicate with us regularly and provide in-put as to how they envision our Prison Project operating. These are very solid contacts and the running of our project has begun to depend on the ideas of these brothers and sisters to a large extent.

At the last NSCM, we set down a statement of purpose for our prison work. We feel that this statement has been realized and should continue to be the guideline for our work. Our major focus of work has been on tying together the struggles going on in various prisons, while at the same time tying these struggles in with the over-all anti-imperialist movement. Prisoners have picked up on this idea in a very positive way, and have encouraged this focus of our prison work. We cannot, nor should we, be organizing the prison movement. Thus, we feel the focus of work we have arrived at is correct and has been proved out in our practice. It is true that in certain cases we have been able to provide help to people in prison (i. e. getting legal assistance, putting people in touch with people who are better able to help them, etc), but the majority of our work has been, and should continue to be, offering support for struggles, corresponding with people and providing political discussion on a variety of issues. We have learned the importance of being honest with these brothers and sisters, and have continued to express that prison organizing is not the major focus of our work. They have welcomed this honesty, with an understanding that our major work lies outside prison walls, though they also understand that our concern with lending support to their struggles is sincere.

An example of the way in which prisoners have related to our day-to-day work may be seen in the way they responded to our national demonstration in Washington. Prior to the demo, we sent out petitions (Declaration of Solidarity and Support) which put forward the five demands. These petitions were designed to be circulated so that knowledge of our demands could be spread, and so that our brothers and sisters in prisons could in some manner plug into the demonstration and express their support of our demands. The response to these petitions was very impressive -- we received over 750 signatures from prisons in all parts of the country. When the petitions were returned, letters of support for our demands and much interest around the demo was expressed from the "inside." We feel that this shows that these brothers and sisters do relate to the daily work of our organization and that they have an understanding of what our work is all about, as well as how our work relates to their particular oppression.

We hope to be able to tie in this understanding of VVAW/WSO in more concrete ways in the future. For example, we will be discussing the future of VVAW/WSO, and since the majority of our prison membership relates very strongly to being members, we are expecting many responses from people on questions such as these. We hope to be able to tie the prison membership more closely together by showing that we are concerned with people's opinions on the type of work that VVAW/WSO is in-

INTERNAL REPORT

Most of the activity around the country during the past 4 months centered around the DC demonstration. The strength and effectiveness of many regions was reflected by the numbers of participants in the demo. Some regions such as Colorado and California had problems which come from geography and lack of transportation; at the same time, the fact that only a handful of people came from places such as Alabama or the Carolinas accurately reflected the amount of organizational work which was done in those places.

Because of the demo, communications to and from the NO have been less frequent than usual, and the majority of them dealt with aspects of the demonstration. (Pre-demo work in the regions will be covered in the demo section of this report.) We cannot, therefore, give more than an overview of the growth of particular regions. Two regions, New England and Eastern Pa, both of which were functioning on a low level of activity at the time of the last NSCM have revived through work on the demo and after. The Washington-Alaska region has also begun to revive, and a few interested people are at work in Oregon and in Idaho-Montana. Otherwise, strong regions continue to grow; some of the weaker regions have gotten weaker or gone under completely.

We have good communications, in general, concerning what individual chapters and regions are doing; what we do not get is a political analysis of what is going on. We feel there is a need for the organization to pass around the knowledge which comes out of our practice. The internal newsletter is one good way to do this. We need something more than the fact that a chapter has appeared on a couple of TV shows, or picketed the VA (though we need this information also). What was the effect of the action? How was it effective (or ineffective), and how could it have been improved? How did it build the chapter or the anti-imperialist movement? An unusual activity--like the New York City shit list--should be advertised to other chapters, but we can only do so if we know about it.

We are asking chapters and regions to analyze their own actions or activities, to make decisions about particular campaigns or programs--and then to feed that information to the NO so that we can print it for the benefit of other chapters. This is one of the functions which we believe the internal newsletter should fulfill.

We also feel that the organization has grown--both physically and politically--to the extent that we now can and must make a realistic assessment of our strengths and weaknesses as an organization--where we have active chapters or contacts, and where we do not. Our chapter listings are full of chapters which are nothing more than a mailbox number, and do as much work as a number can be expected to do. Partly, we believe, this comes from the tendency to hype our own region, to see the regions as competitive, and to base this competition on the number of chapters we list on paper. This tendency clearly omits the fact that we are a national, not regional organization. What we feel is needed is a full-scale housecleaning so that we, as an organization, know where we are: that will give us a clear point from which to continue to build. We therefore ask regional offices to contact the chapters in the region and get the information as to whom is real and who is phantom to the NO.

The problems caused by phantom chapters lead to a larger question, one which we believe should be considered at a workshop during this meeting. We propose that

EXTERNAL REPORT

The past four months have seen a steady deepening and broadening of our ties with other progressive forces, both here in the U. S. and elsewhere around the world. As VVAW/WSO matures, it becomes increasingly necessary for us to maintain these ties and to understand their great significance to us. We must constantly guard against neglecting external relationships, dismissing them as unimportant or unrelated to our work. The July demonstration in Washington clearly proved just how important they actually can be. Without the substantial support we received from many other organizations in building for the July demo, we could not have made it nearly so great a success as it was.

As we pointed out in the external National Office report to the Milwaukee NSCM, such united actions have neither caused us to lose our independence as an organization or forced us to water down our anti-imperialist politics to meaningless reformism. Rather, VVAW/WSO has come out of the experience as a much stronger and more capable organization. Principled, united action will both build VVAW/WSO and the general anti-imperialist movement.

Overseas, VVAW/WSO has reaffirmed existing relations with a number of groups and has established new relations with others. We continue to maintain regular communications with our Indochinese comrades in North and South Vietnam and in Cambodia. Elsewhere, VVAW/WSO GI chapters in Japan have continued their very close working relationship with Japanese peace groups such as Beherein. We have been in recent communication with representatives of numerous Italian progressive groups, have established relations with the Dutch GI movement in Holland and have strengthened our ties with representatives of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

VVAW/WSO members participated in the highly successful Montreal Conference on Vietnam in early June. This conference was organized and sponsored by the Association of Vietnamese Patriots in Canada and was attended by a wide variety of Canadian and U. S. organizations. More recently, our Yokosuka chapter represented VVAW/WSO at the 20th World Conference Against A & H Bombs in Tokyo. Organized by the Japanese peace group, Gensuikyo, this conference marks the sixth time that VVAW/WSO members have participated in anti-nuclear war activities organized by Gensuikyo.

Domestically, VVAW/WSO continues to work closely with a wide spectrum of progressive forces in the U. S. movement. There are few regions that do not work with at least a few groups in their area on a regular basis. In addition to these ties, the National Office mails out copies of Winter Soldier and other VVAW/WSO organizational materials on a monthly basis to the majority of movement groups in the U. S. Whether they like us or not, most groups have definitely heard from us. Finally, we are happy to report that our ties have strengthened with many GI projects. Communications have increased and visits to many projects on both the east and west coast took place in recent months.

There are exceptions to this general picture, of course. Overall, our rela-